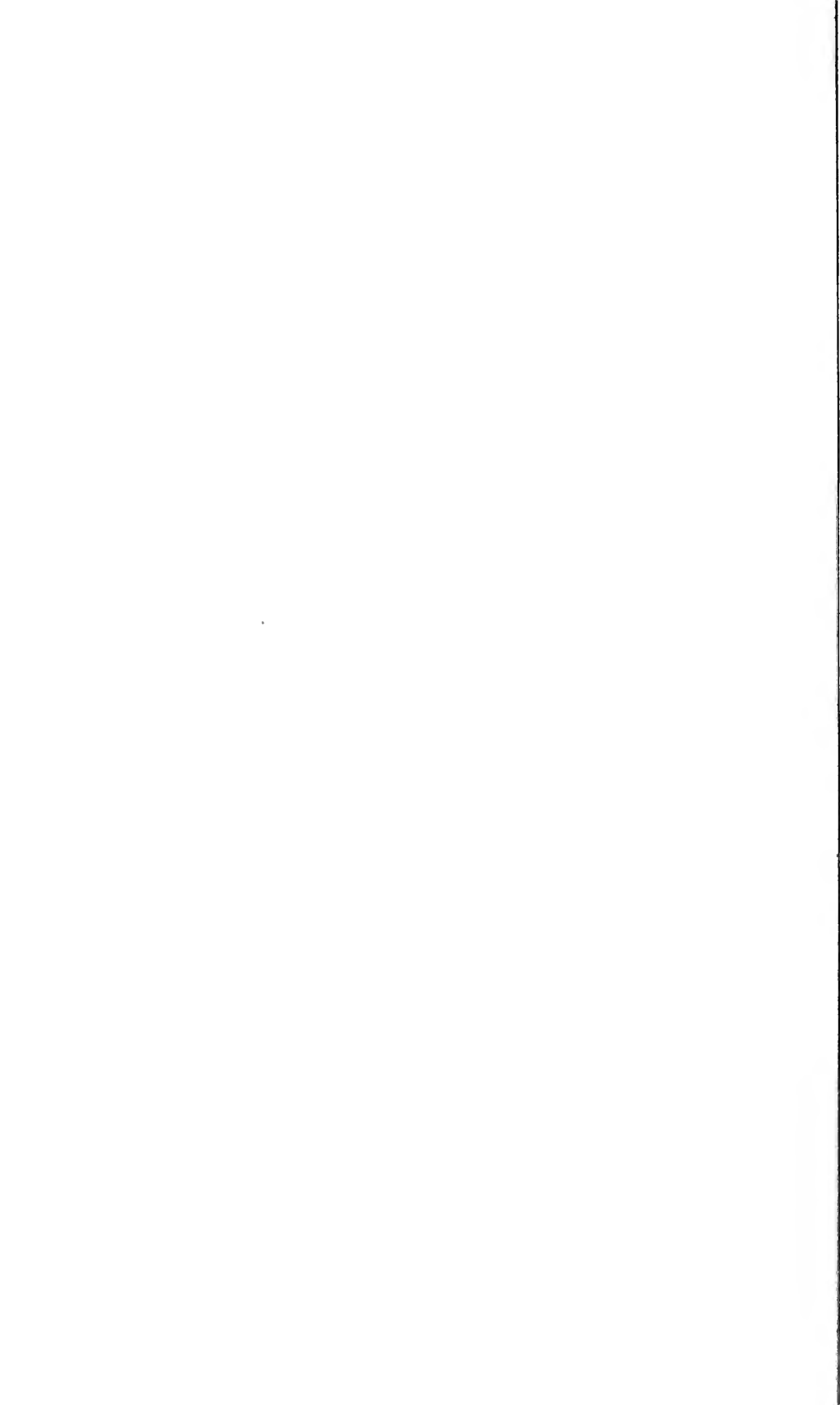




BS 491.5 .S5 1832 v.6
Simeon, Charles, 1759-1836.
Horae homileticae





THE
ENTIRE WORKS
OF THE
REV. CHARLES SIMEON, M.A.
WITH COPIOUS INDEXES,
PREPARED BY THE REV.
THOMAS HARTWELL HORNE, B.D.

LONDON:



PRINTED BY RICHARD CLAY, BREAD-STREET-HILL.

HORÆ HOMILETIÆ:

OR

DISCOURSES

(PRINCIPALLY IN THE FORM OF SKELETONS)

NOW FIRST DIGESTED INTO ONE CONTINUED SERIES,

AND FORMING A COMMENTARY

UPON EVERY BOOK OF

THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT;

TO WHICH IS ANNEXED,

AN IMPROVED EDITION OF A TRANSLATION OF

CLAUDE'S ESSAY ON THE COMPOSITION OF A SERMON.

IN TWENTY-ONE VOLUMES.

BY THE REV. CHARLES SIMEON, M.A.

SENIOR FELLOW OF KING'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

VOL. VI.

PSALMS, LXXIII.—CL.

LONDON:

HOLDSWORTH AND BALL,

18, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD.

M DCCC XXXII.

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P S A L M S.

DCXXIII.

THE GOODNESS OF GOD TO ISRAEL.

Ps. lxxiii. 1. *Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart.*

THE aversion which men usually feel to a vindication of God's absolute sovereignty, proceeds from an idea, that the exercise of it would be repugnant to his other perfections of goodness and mercy. But there is no just foundation for this conceit: nor is there any reason why we should doubt the sovereignty of God, any more than any other of his attributes. That God does dispense his favours according to his own will is an undeniable truth: how else can we account for his taking one nation from the midst of another nation, and forming them for his peculiar people, and giving them his righteous laws, and expelling seven nations from the land of Canaan in order to give it to his chosen people for their inheritance? But however freely he exercises his own prerogative in this respect, he will take care that his final appointment of men's states shall accord with perfect equity: he even calls the day in which that decision shall pass, "The day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God." The truth is, that though God has no respect to men's moral characters in the *first* communications of his mercy, he invariably transforms the objects of that mercy in such a manner, as to make it suitable and proper that he should confer upon them the ultimate and everlasting tokens of his love. The Israel of old, and those to whom that name at this time belongs, were, and are, a chosen people: but all the true Israel are renewed in the spirit of their minds; they are "such

as are of a clean heart;" and therefore they are such as may reasonably hope to experience the transcendent goodness of their God.

The words before us will naturally lead us to consider,

I. The character of Israel—

"All are not Israel, who are of Israel^a." The true Israel are widely different from those who are only "Israelites after the flesh." They cannot however be known from others by *their outward appearance*. Others may be as modest in their apparel, and as humble in their looks, as they; and yet have no part with them in their more distinctive characters. They cannot be distinguished from others by *their language*. There certainly is a mode of speaking which religious people will adopt: they will be sincere, modest, inoffensive; and will accustom themselves to such speech as, "being seasoned with salt," is calculated to "administer grace to the hearers." But hypocrites may vie with them in this particular also. Nor can they be altogether known from others by *their actions*: for though their actions will doubtless be holy, and just, and good, and extremely different from those of the ungodly world, yet Pharisees and formalists may "cleanse the outside of the cup and platter," and be as punctual and correct in all external duties as any persons whatever.

The true Israelite is known by no external badge, but by "the circumcision of the heart" only^b. He is of a clean heart: he is clean,

1. From idolatrous regards—

[The very best of ungodly men has some idol in his heart which usurps the throne of God. Pleasure, riches, and honour are the common objects of men's regards: but some, who seem indifferent to these things, are no less in subjection to a carnal love of ease, wherein their happiness principally consists. But the true Christian has taken the Lord for his God; and has determined, through grace, that no rival shall ever be harboured in his bosom. He makes his adorable Saviour the one object of all his trust, his love, and his obedience^c.]

2. From allowed lusts—

^a Rom. ix. 6.

^b Rom. ii. 28, 29.

^c Ps. lxxiii. 25.

[None but those who have embraced the promises of the Gospel have been able to “cleanse themselves from all fleshly and spiritual filthiness:” but “all who are really Christ’s, have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.” We say not, that Christians have no lusts remaining in them; (for a man that is crucified may still continue to live a considerable time; and the lusts that are crucified may still live and act:) but their lusts shall never regain the liberty which they once had: the death of their corruption is irreversibly decreed; and their strength is gradually weakening; and in due time they shall utterly expire. In all other persons, sin of some kind has dominion; but over the Christian “it shall not; because he is not under the law, but under grace.”]

3. From sinister and selfish motives—

[All, even the most refined hypocrites, are under the influence of self-seeking and self-complacency. But the true Christian endeavours to consult the glory of his God. He is as jealous of his motives, as of his actions. He knows that *self* is but too apt to mix with what we do; and therefore he labours to counteract its influence, and to do his most common actions to the glory of his God. To please God, to serve God, to honour God, *these* are the ends which he proposes to himself; nor is he ever satisfied with any one action which has not these objects as their true and ultimate scope. He that is “an Israelite indeed, is an Israelite without guile^d.”]

Let us now proceed to contemplate,

II. The character of Israel’s God—

“God is good to *all*, and his tender mercy is over all his works:” but he is more especially good to Israel: for,

1. He is reconciled to them—

[They once were under his displeasure, even as others: but he has given them repentance unto life; he has accepted them in and through his beloved Son; he has blotted out all their transgressions as a morning cloud; and “he has given them a name better than of sons and of daughters.” These are peculiar mercies not vouchsafed to others, whatever be their profession, or whatever their character.]

2. He admits them to most familiar communion with himself—

[Others may have prayed in some peculiar extremity, and may have obtained deliverance from their distress; but “they will not *always* call upon God:” prayer is not their delight; nor have they any freedom of access to God in it. But “the

^d John i. 47.

true Israel" are "a people nigh unto God." It is their delight to draw nigh to God at all times, to make known to him their requests on all occasions, and to walk continually in the light of his countenance. He, on the other hand, like a tender parent, condescends to hear and answer their petitions, and reveals himself to them as he does not unto the world. Thus, while others perform prayer as a mere service which they would think it criminal to neglect, *they* account it their highest privilege to say, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ."]

3. He makes all things to work together for their good—

[Many dark and afflictive dispensations do they meet with; but not one more than shall issue in their good. Under the pressure of their trials they may be ready to say, "All these things are against me:" but they shall at last see reason to confess, that "it is good for them that they have been afflicted." God has expressly promised, that "all things should work together for their good;" and he sooner or later fulfils the promise, to every one that loves him, and that trusts in him. The persecutions of men and the temptations of Satan shall ultimately conduce to this end: "The wrath of men and devils shall praise him; and the remainder of it," which would counteract his designs, "he will restrain."]

4. He has prepared for them a glorious and everlasting inheritance—

[To others he generally gives a greater measure of earthly wealth: but "for these he has prepared a city;" being "not ashamed to be called their God." The very hope and prospect of that far outweighs all earthly possessions; What then must the actual enjoyment of it be! With what emphasis do those in heaven say, "Truly God is good to Israel!" Well does David exclaim, "O how great is thy goodness which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee!" But we must wait till we come to heaven, before we can form any adequate idea of this glorious subject.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are ignorant of God—

[You are ready to think of God only as a harsh Master, and a severe Judge: but if you knew him aright, you would cry out, with the prophet, "How great is his goodness! how great is his beauty!" The fact is, that while your heart is so corrupt, you cannot form any correct judgment concerning God: your eyes are jaundiced, and you behold all his perfections, yea, and his dispensations too, under false colours: "the light

^e Ps. xxxi. 19.

shines; but your darkness doth not comprehend it." If you would know him as he is, pray that he would "create in you a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within you." Then shall you be disposed to admire the justice and holiness which you now hate, and, instead of denying his distinguishing grace, you will seek to obtain an interest in it^f.]

2. Those who are tempted to think hardly of God—

[This had been the state of the Psalmist's mind, just before he penned this psalm: and it was on finding his error, that he abruptly exclaimed, "Truly God is good," notwithstanding all I have been tempted to think to the contrary. The same temptations are common with us: and when we see the ungodly triumphing and the righteous afflicted, we are ready to say, "I have cleansed my heart *in vain*, and washed my hands in innocency." But go into the sanctuary, as David did, and then you will learn the different ends of the righteous and the wicked. Take eternity into your estimate, and the delusion will vanish; and you will see, that no state in which an ungodly man can possibly be, is any more to be compared with yours, than the twinkling of a taper is with the light and splendour of the meridian sun.]

^f See Ps. cvi. 4, 5.

DCXXIV.

PROSPERITY OF SINNERS NOT TO BE ENVIED.

Ps. lxxiii. 16, 17. *When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; until I went into the sanctuary of God: then understood I their end.*

TO unenlightened man, there are numberless things in the dispensations of Providence altogether dark and inexplicable: it is the light of Revelation only that enables us to form any just notions respecting them. Moreover, after that men are enlightened, they still are liable to be disconcerted and perplexed by the events which daily occur, in proportion as they lean to their own understandings, and neglect to avail themselves of the means which are afforded them for the regulation of their judgment. Nor has Satan any more powerful instruments wherewith to assault the minds of Believers, than those which he derives from this source. The temptation with which he assaulted our first parents in Paradise, was furnished by the prohibition which God had given them to eat

of a certain tree; "Hath God said, Ye shall not eat of *every* tree of the garden?" insinuating, that such a prohibition could never have proceeded from a God of love. In like manner, if God have seen fit to deny his people any particular comfort which he has vouchsafed to others, or suffered them to be afflicted in any respect more than others, Satan suggests to their minds, How can these dispensations consist with his professed regard for you as his own peculiar people? Thus their subtle adversary would instil into their minds hard thoughts of God, and a distrust of his providential care. It was in this way that he assaulted the author of the psalm before us, and caused him almost to renounce his confidence in God. The Psalmist himself (whether it were Asaph, or David, we cannot certainly declare) tells us, how nearly he was overcome by this temptation: "As for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped: for I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." He proceeds more fully to state the difficulty with which his mind was harassed, and the way in which the snare was broken: and as the subject is of universal interest, we will draw your attention to it, by stating,

I. The difficulty—

It is frequently seen that the wicked prosper, whilst the godly are grievously oppressed—

[The godly are for the most part "a poor and afflicted people^a." They are objects of hatred and contempt to an ungodly world^b, and they suffer much from the unkind treatment which they meet with^c. Not unfrequently, "their greatest foes are those of their own household." From the hand of God also they receive many strokes of fatherly correction, from which the avowed enemies of God are in great measure exempt^d. It is necessary also, with a view to the accomplishment of God's purpose of love towards them, that they should, for the most part, "be in heaviness through manifold temptations^e."

The wicked, on the contrary, frequently pass through life without any particular trials^f: having nothing to humble them, they are lifted up with pride, (which they glory in as their brightest ornament^g;) and are encompassed with violence, as

^a Zeph. iii. 12.

^b John xv. 19.

^c 2 Tim. iii. 12.

^d Heb. xii. 6—8.

^e 1 Pet. i. 6.

^f ver. 4, 5.

^g Dan. v. 29. with ver. 6.

their daily habit: they gratify their sensual appetites, "till their eyes stand out with fatness^h:" they despise all restraint, whether human or divineⁱ; and even atheistically question, Whether God notices and regards the conduct of his creatures^k. These are the persons who generally get forward in life, and engross to themselves the wealth and honours of a corrupt world. Doubtless, in countries where the rights of individuals are secured by just laws and a righteous administration, this inequality will be less apparent, than in places, where there is more scope afforded for the unrestrained exercise of fraud and violence: but in every place there is ample evidence, that worldly prosperity is the attainment, not of spiritual, but of carnal minds — — —]

This, to the carnal mind, presents a difficulty not easy to be explained—

[There is in the mind of man a general idea that the Governor of the universe will testify by his present dispensations his love for virtue, and his hatred of iniquity. The friends of Job carried this notion so far, that, without any other evidence than what arose from his peculiar trials, they concluded, that *he* must of necessity have been a hypocrite and deceiver, whom justice at last had visibly overtaken. Nor could Job himself understand, how it should be, that the prosperity of the wicked should be so great, whilst he, who had walked in his integrity, was so overwhelmed with troubles^l. Even the Prophet Jeremiah, who might be supposed to have a deeper insight into divine truth than Job, was stumbled at the same thing^m: and therefore we must not wonder that it operates as a temptation in the minds of the generality.

Under the Mosaic dispensation, the difficulty of accounting for these things was certainly very great: for all the sanctions of the Law were almost, if not altogether, of a temporal nature: temporal prosperity was promised, and *that* too in very general and unqualified terms, as the reward of obedience; and temporal judgments were threatened as the punishment of disobedience: and consequently, when the wicked prospered and the righteous were oppressed, it seemed as if the providence of God were in direct opposition to his word. Nor did Moses alone give ground for such expectations: even David himself had said, that "they who sought the Lord should want no manner of thing that was goodⁿ." Nay more, the same language is used in the New Testament: If we "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all earthly comforts shall be added unto us." And again, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth^o." Now it may be asked, How can this consist with

^h ver. 7.

ⁱ ver. 8, 9. Mark the language of ver. 9.

^k ver. 11.

^l Job xxi. 7—13.

^m Jer. xii. 1.

ⁿ Ps. xxxiv. 10. and lxxxiv. 11.

^o Matt. v. 5. and vi. 33.

the exaltation of the wicked, and the almost universal depression of the righteous, of whom it may be said, that “they are plagued all the day long, and chastened every morning^p?”]

But the Psalmist, having stated his difficulty, gives us,

II. The solution—

To the carnal mind the difficulty is insurmountable: but “if we enter into the sanctuary of God,” it will vanish instantly. There we shall see the lamentable state of the wicked in the midst of their prosperity;

1. The danger of their way—

[“Their feet are set in slippery places,” where it is, humanly speaking, impossible for them to stand. This may appear a strong assertion; but it is not at all too strong: it is the assertion of our Lord himself^q — — — Indeed, it is with great justice said by Solomon, that “the prosperity of fools destroyeth them^r,” for it almost universally generates those very dispositions which are so strongly depicted in the psalm before us^s. If riches increase, we are immediately ready “to set our heart upon them^t,” and to trust in them rather than in God^u. They foster pride in the heart of the possessor^x; and lead not unfrequently to an oppressive conduct towards the poor^y, and to the most daring impiety towards God^z. Are they then to be envied, who are placed in such perilous circumstances? or are they to be envied, who, when running for their lives, have “their feet laden with thick clay?” Be it so, that the rich have many comforts which the poor taste not of: but what enjoyment can that man have of a feast, who sees a sword suspended over his head by a single hair, and knows not but that it may fall and pierce him the very next minute? So the man who knows his own weakness, and the force of the temptations to which he may be exposed, will be well satisfied to have such a portion only of this world as God sees fit to give him; and will abundantly prefer the eternal welfare of his soul before all the gratifications that wealth or honour can afford him.]

2. The awfulness of their end—

[As God raised up Pharaoh to the throne of Egypt, with an intent to shew forth in him his wrathful indignation against sin^a; so he loads with temporal benefits many, who shall

^p ver. 14.

^q Mark x. 23—27.

^r Prov. i. 32.

^s ver. 6—11.

^t Ps. lxii. 10.

^u 1 Tim. vi. 17. Luke xii. 19.

^x Prov. xviii. 23.

^y Jam. ii. 6.

^z Jam. ii. 7.

^a Rom. ix. 17.

finally be made objects of his heavy displeasure for their abuse of them. He bears with them for a season: but "their feet shall slide in due time^b;" and then "they will be cast down into everlasting destruction^c." O how terrible is their transi- tion in a single instant, from a fulness of all earthly comforts to an utter destitution^d even of "a drop of water to cool their tongue!" Think of the Rich Man who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: what a change did he experience the moment that his soul departed from the body! The next thing we hear of him is, that "he was in hell, lifting up his eyes in torment," such as no words can describe, no imagination can conceive^e. Lazarus, on the contrary, who in this world had not the most common necessaries of life, was enjoying unspeakable and endless felicity in Abraham's bosom. Who that beholds the termination of their career, would not infinitely prefer the temporal estate of Lazarus, even though it should last a thousand years, before all the vanishing gratifications of the man of wealth? If it should be thought that this rich man was more addicted to sin than others, the account we have of him suggests no ground for it whatever: on the contrary, it tells us, that his five surviving brethren, who inherited his wealth, were, like him, yielding to the sad influence of the temptations which it offered, and therefore were hastening to that same place of torment, to which he had been consigned^f. Doubtless it is painful to reflect on the thoughtless security of millions, who, if not guilty of any flagrant enormity, have no conception of the predicament in which they stand. But the Scripture speaks too plainly on this subject to admit of any doubt^g — — Say then, Are these to be envied? Alas! if viewed aright, they must be regarded only as persons accumulating wrath upon their own heads^h, or as victims fattening for the slaughterⁱ: and consequently, their superior prosperity in earthly things affords no ground for complaint to the godly, however destitute they may be, or however afflicted.]

Let us LEARN then from this subject,

1. To mark the motions of our own hearts—

[We greatly deceive ourselves if we imagine that our *actions* afford a sufficient criterion for judging of our state. There are many who indulge in all manner of evil *thoughts*, whilst yet they are restrained by merely political considerations from carrying them into effect. Whilst therefore man

^b Deut. xxxii. 35.

^c ver. 18.

^d ver. 19.

^e Luke xvi. 23, 24.

^f Luke xvi. 27, 28.

^g Ps. xcii. 7. Job xx. 4—7. and xxi. 30. Prov. xxiii. 17, 18.

^h Rom. ii. 5.

ⁱ Jam. v. 1, 2, 3, 5.

sees nothing amiss in us, God may see our " hearts to be full of evil." It was not any overt act that the Psalmist spoke of in our text, but of his thoughts only: and yet he acknowledges, that they had well nigh destroyed and ruined his soul^k. O let us observe from time to time the various thoughts that arise in our corrupt hearts, (the proud, the vain, the envious, the wrathful, the vindictive, the impure, the covetous, the worldly thoughts,) and let us humble ourselves for them in dust and ashes, and pray, that " the thoughts of our hearts may be forgiven us!" If we view ourselves as we really are in the sight of God, we shall see that we may, on many occasions, justly, and without hyperbole, say, " So foolish am I and ignorant, I am even as a beast before thee^m."]

2. To be satisfied with our condition—

[To Judas was consigned the custody of the stock provided for the daily support of our Lord and his disciples. What if the other disciples had envied him that honour? would they have been wise? Judas was a thief: and the pre-eminence he enjoyed, afforded him an opportunity of gratifying his covetous desires, whilst the rest were free from any such temptation. God knows that many of those things which we would fain enjoy, would only prove snares and temptations to our souls. He sees, not only the evil that *does exist*, but the evil also that *might* arise, within us: and he withholds in mercy many things, which he knows would be injurious to our spiritual welfare. How happy would it have been for the Rich Youth in the Gospel, if, instead of being possessed of wealth, he had been as poor as Lazarus! It was his wealth alone that induced him to forego all hope of an interest in Christ": and, if he had been a poor man, he might, for aught we know, have been at this moment a blest inhabitant of heaven. Let us then remember, that if God sends us trials which we would gladly escape, or withholds comforts which we would desire to possess, he does it in wisdom, and in love: and in all probability we shall one day see reason to adore him for the things which we now deplore, as much as for any of those benefits in which we are most disposed to rejoice.]

3. To seek above all things the prosperity of our souls—

[Here is full scope for our ambition. We may " covet, as earnestly as we will, the best gifts." We must not indeed *grudge* to any their higher attainments: but we may take occasion from the superior piety of others to aspire after the highest possible communications of grace and peace. Were we to possess the whole world, we must leave it all, and " go

^k ver. 2, 3. ^l Acts viii. 22. ^m ver. 22. ⁿ Mark x. 22.

as naked out of the world as we came into it." But, if we possess spiritual riches, we shall carry them with us into the eternal world, and have our weight of glory proportioned to them. The operation of *these* upon our souls needs not to be feared: they bring no snare with them; or, if they be accompanied with a temptation to pride, they will lead us to Him, who will assuredly supply an antidote, to screen us from its injurious effects°. If we are "rich towards God," we are truly rich; yea, though we possess nothing in the world besides, we may exult, as "having nothing, and yet possessing all things^p."]]

° 2 Cor. xii. 7—9.

p 2 Cor. vi. 10.

DCXXV.

THE CHRISTIAN'S EXPERIENCE AND HOPES.

Ps. lxxiii. 23, 24. *I am continually with thee: Thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.*

THERE are in the Holy Scriptures many expressions which are difficult to be reconciled with each other. For instance, the Psalmist, in the very words before my text, says, "So foolish was I and ignorant, I was as a beast before thee." Yet behold, in the text itself, he speaks as one enjoying the sublimest communion with his God, and possessing a most confident expectation of his favour. Now, how is this to be explained? The fact is, that he had been sorely tempted to envy the ungodly world, when he saw how prosperous they were, in comparison of many of God's most faithful servants. But when he reflected on "the end" that awaited them, he condemned his former thoughts, as betraying rather the ignorance of a beast than the judgment of a real saint: and then he congratulated himself as elevated far above the most prosperous of ungodly men, in that, whatever he might want in this world, he possessed God himself for his friend, his counsellor, his everlasting portion.

I shall take occasion from these words to consider the saint in,

I. His present experience—

Here we see, the saint with his God, in a way of humble dependence; and his God with him, in a way of effectual support.

1. The saint with his God—

[Numberless are the difficulties with which the Christian is encompassed, whilst yet in himself he has not power to surmount the smallest of them. In fact, he has to wrestle not only with flesh and blood, but with all the principalities and powers of hell itself. What then shall he do? How shall he entertain a hope of a successful issue? He would sit down in utter despair, but that he remembers he has with him, at all times, a Friend, who is almighty, and all-sufficient for him. He has been taught to look unto God as his Father in Christ Jesus: he has been assured, that, since he has fled to Christ for refuge, and sought for reconciliation with God through Him, he is entitled to regard God as a friend, and to commit into his hands his every concern. Hence he becomes composed, in the midst of all his trials; and comforts himself with the reflection, ‘I am continually with my God: I see him ever present with me: confiding in him, I have no fear: it is a small matter to me what confederacies there may be against me: having him at hand, I need no other help: I therefore repose all my confidence on him, and “cast all my care on him”.’]

2. His God with him—

[To enter fully into this idea; conceive of a child passing over rocks where there is scarcely room for his feet; and where the path is so slippery, that it is scarcely possible for him to stand; and where there are precipices on every hand so steep and tremendous, that a single false step must of necessity cause him to be dashed in pieces. Conceive a father guiding his beloved child in all this way; “holding him by his right hand,” that he may not fall; and raising him up, if at any time he have fallen; and preserving him from all the dangers to which he is exposed. Here you see our God with the soul who trusts in him. Not for a moment does he leave the trembling saint: and it is altogether in consequence of this effectual help that any saint in the universe is enabled to pursue his way. Hence every child of God ascribes his safety to him who has thus upheld him; and with unfeigned gratitude exclaims, “My foot standeth fast: in the congregation will I bless the Lord^a.”]

In unison with his present experience, are,

II. His future prospects—

^a Ps. xxvi. 12.

“Knowing in whom he has believed,” he expects—

1. Guidance in all his way—

[In addition to all the difficulties of his journey, he knows not which way he is to pursue. He has a general notion of his path: but an infinite variety of circumstances occur from time to time, to render it difficult to discern which is the way in which it will be best and safest for him to proceed. He is aware that one single step may lead to consequences inconceivably important. Joseph was sent to visit his brethren. The step was good: but oh! to what a diversity of trials did it lead^b! David also was sent to visit his brethren: here too the step was good; and from it resulted the victory over Goliath, and the deliverance of Israel from their oppressors^c. In the consciousness that God alone can guide him, he asks counsel of the Lord every step he takes: and God vouchsafes to guide his feet into the way of peace. There are many different means which God is pleased to make use of for the direction of his people: sometimes he guides by his word; sometimes by his Spirit; sometimes by his providence, opening or shutting a door, as is pleasing in his sight: diversifying these as he sees occasion, he accomplishes his gracious ends; just as, in the days of old, he led his people Israel through the trackless wilderness, till they came in safety to the Promised Land.

The entire process may be seen, as it were, realized in actual life. Behold the saint's desire of counsel, as expressed in the prayers of David^d——— and mark the accomplishment of that desire in the consolations and encouragements administered to the waiting soul^e——— And this is exactly what every believing soul is warranted to expect: “I will instruct thee, and teach thee in the way thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye^f.”]

2. Glory at the end—

[Never will God cease from his offices of love, till he has completed all his gracious purposes, and fulfilled the utmost desires of those who wait upon him. Glory is that to which every soul looks forward, as the consummation of its bliss: that is “the joy that is set before us, the prize of our high calling,” “the recompence of our reward;” and God will not suffer his people to come short of it. “He will fulfil in them all the good pleasure of his goodness,” till the work which has been begun in grace is consummated in glory. Of this St. Paul was confident^g; and in the prospect of it every believing soul

^b Gen. xxxvii. 14. ^c 1 Sam. xvii. 20. ^d Ps. cxliii. 4—8.

^e Isai. xli. 10—15. ^f Ps. xxxii. 8. ^g Phil. i. 6.

may rejoice, even as if he were already in possession of the full result^h — —]

SEE, then, the Christian's life exhibited before you.

It is,

1. An arduous life—

[The people of the world imagine it an easy thing to get to heaven: but the real saint finds it far otherwise. They glide down the stream in a way of carnal gratification: but he has to go against the stream of corrupt nature, and to stem the tide of a voluptuous world. Were it so easy a matter to serve the Lord, it would never have been characterized by terms which convey so different an idea. The wrestler, the racer, the warrior, find that they have enough to do, in order to obtain a successful issue to their exertions.]

2. An anxious life—

[St. Paul says, "I would have you without carefulness." But our Lord says, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." Unbelieving anxiety is doubtless to be put away: but watchfulness and holy fear are never to be intermitted one single moment. St. Peter knew, by bitter experience, how needful that caution was, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your Adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about, seeking whom he may devour." It would ill become a man on the borders of eternity to indulge a careless frame of mind. The most eminent saint in the universe should "take heed lest he fall," and should "walk in the fear of the Lord all the day long."]

3. A happy life—

[It should seem as if anxiety were inconsistent with happiness. And it would be so, if we knew not where to look for the grace that is needful for us. But the very trials which drive us to our God for help, are the means of drawing forth the succours which God has promised, and of bringing God himself into closer union with us. In truth, it is from such discoveries of the divine character, and such communications of the heavenly grace, that the Believer derives his sublimest pleasures: and he is then most truly happy, when "his fellowship is most intimate with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christⁱ."]

4. A glorious life—

[To the eye of sense, a Believer is only like a common man, and his walk like that of other men: but to the eye of faith it is not so. A Believer walks with God: his soul is

^h Rom. viii. 33—39.

ⁱ 1 John i. 3.

brought into closest union with the Deity. What has been said of a father and a son, does but very faintly convey what actually passes between God and him. There is, on the one part, the entire dependence of his soul on God; and, on the other part, the tender care of a father exercised towards him in every step he takes. Throughout the whole of his life is this continued, till the period has arrived for his being invested with all the glory and felicity of heaven. And is not this a glorious life; ordered as it is by the Father; prepared by the Son; effected by the Holy Spirit; begun in grace; consummated in glory? Think what ye will, this is a glorious life indeed; a life which even an angel might affect; and which is, in some respects, more glorious than that of angels, inasmuch as it is the effect of Redeeming Love, and will issue in louder songs of praise and thanksgiving, than the angels, who never experienced such trials, will ever be able to sing.]

DCXXVI.

THE CHRISTIAN'S CHOICE.

Ps. lxxiii. 25. *Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.*

THIS evil and deceitful world promises happiness to its votaries; and men, naturally carnal, are too willing to be deceived by it. Even the godly themselves are sometimes drawn aside by its delusions; but when the snare is broken, they see, and lament their folly^a. David contrasted the mirth of the wicked with the troubles he had to conflict with, and was ready to conclude that they had a better portion than himself^b; but on deeper investigation he found, that their happiness was soon to end^c. Whereas, however difficult his path at present was, God would guide him safely to the regions of eternal felicity^d.

Hence, as the result of his more deliberate judgment, he determines to take God as his only portion^e.

I. The Christian's choice—

The Christian, by nature, differs not at all from those who are still in darkness. He once chose the

^a ver. 22.

^b ver. 3, 4, 5, 10, 12, 13, 14.

^c ver. 17—20.

^d ver. 23, 24.

^e The text.

world as the portion in which his soul delighted, but now he renounces it as sincerely as he ever loved it—

[He does not indeed treat it with stoical indifference. He knows that wealth and honour are capable of important uses, and that, if God bestow them, they may be richly enjoyed^f. But he is well assured that they are not a satisfying portion: he is persuaded that our cares increase with our possessions^g, and that Solomon's testimony respecting the world is true^h.]

God is the one object of his choice—

[Before his conversion he could think as lightly of God as othersⁱ, but grace has altogether changed his sentiments and desires. God appears to him now exceeding great and glorious. The love of God in sending his own Son to die for us has made an indelible impression on his mind. Since the Christian has been enabled to see this mystery, all created beauties have vanished as the stars before the sun. There is nothing "on earth" which, in his eyes, can stand for one moment in competition with his incarnate God. The pleasures, riches, and honours of the world seem lighter than vanity: by the cross of Christ he is utterly crucified to them all^k. Without the Saviour's presence there would be nothing desirable even "in heaven" itself; the glorified saints and angels would have nothing to attract the soul, nor would the bright regions in which they dwell, be any better than darkness itself. Created glory would be utterly extinguished, if the Sun of righteousness were withdrawn^l. The Christian has ALL in God; without him NOTHING.]

Nor is this an exaggerated description of the Christian's character—

[The children of God in all ages have been of one mind in these respects. Though their *attainments* have been different, their *aims* have been the same. David frequently expresses, in yet stronger terms, his desires after God^m, and declares that he coveted nothing so much as the divine presenceⁿ. St. Paul had as much to glory in as any man whatever, yet he despised it all as dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ^o. Nor were these views peculiar to these distinguished servants of God, they were common to all the saints in the days of old^p; nor is there a true Christian now, who, if interrogated respecting true happiness, would not reply in the language of the Psalmist^q.]

^f 1 Tim. vi. 17.

^g Eccl. v. 11.

^h Eccl. ii. 11.

ⁱ Job xxi. 15.

^k Gal. vi. 14.

^l Rev. xxi. 23.

^m Ps. xlii. 1, 2. and lxiii. 1, 2.

ⁿ Ps. xxvii. 4.

^o Phil. iii. 7, 8.

^p Isai. xxvi. 8, 9.

^q Ps. iv. 6.

However enthusiastic such a choice may be thought by a blind and sensual world, it is perfectly rational and wise—

II. The reasons of it—

Whatever men choose, they invariably choose it under the idea of good. Now there is no created good that can be at all compared with God :

1. He is an *ever-present* portion—

[We may possess many things, yet not have them with us in the time of necessity; yea, we may be utterly deprived of them by fraud or violence: but God is every where present to afford us help: though we be immured in a dungeon, he can visit us; nor can any human power intercept his gracious communications. This was a reflection peculiarly grateful to the Psalmist^r, and, doubtless, was an important ground on which he fixed his choice^s.]

2. He is an *all-sufficient* portion—

[A man may enjoy all which this world can bestow, but what can it avail him while racked with excruciating pains? What relief can it afford him under the agonies of a guilty conscience? Or what can it do to appease the fears of death? But there is no situation wherein God is not a suitable portion. In the possession of earthly blessings, his presence will greatly enhance our enjoyment of them. In the absence of all temporal comforts, with HIM we can feel no want^t. A view of him as our friend will allay every fear, and assuage every pain; nor, having HIM, can we want any other thing that is good^u.]

3. He is an *eternal* portion—

[However long we retain earthly things, we must part with them at last. Death will reduce us to a level with the poorest of mankind, nor can we carry any thing along with us into the invisible world^x. But, if God be ours, we shall possess him for ever. We are not left without many rich communications from him *now*; yea, sometimes, even in this vale of tears, our joy in him is unspeakable^y. But it is not till after death that we shall have the full enjoyment of him. *Now* we taste of the streams; *then* we shall drink at the fountain-head. *Now* our capacity to enjoy him is but small; *then* all our faculties will be wonderfully enlarged. *Now* our delight

^r Ps. cxxxix. 7—10.

^s Ps. cxxxix. 17, 18.

^t 1 Cor. iii. 21—23. and 2 Cor. vi. 10.

^u Ps. xxxiv. 9, 10.

^x Ps. xlix. 17.

^y 1 Pet. i. 8.

in him is transient; *then*, without intermission or end^z. Hence the Psalmist looked forward to that period for his full satisfaction^a.]

INFER—

1. How little is there of true religion in the world!

[If to be called after the name of Christ were sufficient, his flock would be large. If to attend his ordinances and profess his faith were enough, there would be many in the way to heaven. But God will judge us, not according to our professions, but our practice. That, which alone can constitute us truly religious, is, to choose God for our portion. Can we then, like David, *appeal* to God himself, that we do this? Could we make Peter's reply to the question which was put to him^b? Does the ardour of our devotions attest the strength of our desires after God? Have we the same evidence of our supreme regard for him, that the sensualist or worldling have of their love to the things of time and sense? Let us be assured that God can never be our portion, unless we deliberately choose him in preference to all others.]

2. How enviable a character is the true Christian!

[He can adopt the language of David^c, and of the ancient church^d. Hence, however destitute he may *seem* to be, he needs envy none; he is freed from the cares which corrode the hearts of others; he is sure, not of attaining only, but of possessing for ever, the object of his desires, and that, in proportion as he delights in God, his God will delight in him^e. Surely we cannot but subscribe to the truth of that assertion^f. Let us then beg of God to deliver us from the love of this present evil world, and so to cast the mantle of his love upon us, that we may both follow him and serve him for ever^g.]

^z Ps. xvi. 11.

^a Ps. xvii. 15.

^b John xxi. 17.

^c Ps. xvi. 5.

^d Song v. 10.

^e Zeph. iii. 17.

^f Ps. cxliv. 15.

^g 1 Kings xix. 19—21.

DCXXVII.

BENEFIT OF DRAWING NEAR TO GOD.

Ps. lxxiii. 28. *It is good for me to draw near to God.*

THE dispensations of Providence are often so dark and inscrutable, that the proud man is ready to question the wisdom of them, and almost to doubt whether they are the result of design or chance. The prosperity of the wicked is more particularly a stumbling-block to those who limit their views to the

things of this life. But a more enlarged acquaintance with God and his ways will silence every cavil, and oblige us to confess, that however “clouds and darkness may be round about him, righteousness and judgment are the basis of his throne.” The Psalmist himself for a season was unable to account for the prosperous state of the ungodly, while the righteous were regarded by them as objects of contempt and abhorrence. His reasonings upon the subject could not satisfy his mind: but at last he “went into the sanctuary of God,” and there learned to estimate the ways of God by a very different standard, and to think those the most happy who were happy for eternity. In the review of this experience, he was led to acknowledge the more than brutish stupidity of his soul^a, and the benefit which he had received from drawing near to God: “It is good for me,” says he, “to draw near to God.”

In discoursing on these words, we shall shew,

I. What is meant by drawing near to God—

We must not suppose that any bodily motion is necessary in order to the drawing nigh to God; since he filleth all space, and is “never far from any one of us^b.” The expression in the text imports a drawing nigh to him,

1. With the mind—

[Though “God is a Spirit,” and therefore not to be apprehended with bodily eyes, yet man is able, by the exercise of faith, to place him as it were before the eyes of his mind, and thereby to “see Him that is invisible^c.” Nothing can be more absurd or delusive, than to draw a picture of him, as it were, in our imagination, and to present him before us in a way of vision. Whatever visions were granted to men in former times, it is rather *a sense and consciousness of his presence*, than a sight of him as present, which *we* are to expect. We must not look for such a luminous appearance as Moses saw; but it is our privilege to say with David, “I have set the Lord always before me^d.” When we set God before us, we also set ourselves before him: we summon ourselves into his presence; and endeavour to impress our minds with the conviction that he discerns our inmost thoughts. In this way

^a ver. 22. ^b Acts xvii. 27. ^c Heb. xi. 27. ^d Ps. xvi. 8.

we may properly be said to draw near to him ; because, though in fact we are no nearer to him than before, yet we are much nearer *in our own apprehension* ; and the effect upon our own minds is precisely the same as if the approximation were real.]

2. With the heart—

[The drawing nigh to God is not a work of the understanding only, but also of the heart^e : and the exercises of the one are as necessary as those of the other. Indeed the idea of approaching God without suitable affections, is vain ; since man cannot remain unaffected in the Divine presence ; nor would he be approved of God if he did. It is obvious therefore that an acceptable approach to God must be attended with such emotions, as become a sinner in the presence of his Judge, and a redeemed sinner in the presence of his Lord and Saviour. It must be accompanied with a *fear* of God's majesty, an *admiration* of his goodness, an *affiance* in his mercy, a *love* to his name, a *submission* to his will, a *zeal* for his glory. These various feelings must be expressed in such petitions and acknowledgments as the occasion requires. In short, our drawing nigh to God must somewhat resemble Esther's approach to Ahasuerus. She knew that none but the king could help her ; and that she must perish if she did not obtain favour in his sight : and therefore, with much preparation of mind, she humbly presented herself before him, and then offered her petition in the manner she thought most likely to prevail^f.]

Having ascertained the import of drawing nigh to God, we proceed to shew—

II. The benefit arising from it—

There is no other thing under heaven so “ good for” the soul, as this^g :

1. There is nothing so pleasant—

[We will grant, for argument sake, that the things which this world afford are capable of imparting as much happiness as the votaries of pleasure expect : still the happiness of drawing near to God is incomparably greater. We appear indeed to “ speak parables^h” when we descant on such a subject as this, because the things we affirm can be known only from

^e 1 Cor. xiv. 15.

^f Esth. v. 1—4. This whole head might be changed ; and, instead of it, one might shew, *How we are to draw nigh to God*. This would be more in the common-place way ; but it would be easier, and perhaps more profitable to the lower class of hearers.

^g Lam. iii. 25.

^h Ezek. xx. 49.

Scripture and experience: and people have an easy way of setting both these aside. The words of Scripture are represented as high eastern metaphors: and the experience of the primitive saints is supposed to be confined to the earlier ages of the Church. And with respect to the experience of living saints, that is derided as enthusiasm. But there is a blessedness in communion with God, whether man will admit it or not. To the ungodly it is an irksome task to approach God; but to the godly it is their chief joy. The Psalmist justly says, "Blessed is the man, O Lord, whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto theeⁱ." But how shall we describe this blessedness? How shall we paint the lowly self-abasing thoughts which lead a man to prostrate himself in the very dust before God? How shall we express the wonder and admiration with which he is filled, when he contemplates the goodness of God towards him? How shall we declare the ardour of his feelings when he is adoring that Saviour who bought him with his blood? We do not say, that any man feels at all times the same rapturous and exalted joys; but we do say, that the joys of those who live nigh to God are at some seasons "unspeakable and full of glory^k," an earnest and foretaste of heaven itself.]

2. There is nothing so profitable—

[Not to mention the pardon and acceptance which flow from communion with God, it is certain that it will *restrain from sin*. The presence of a fellow-creature, yea, even of a child, will restrain men from the commission of crimes, which in secret they would perpetrate without remorse. How much more then would a consciousness of God's presence awe us, if we felt it as we ought^l! The falls and apostasies of those who profess religion always originate from, or are preceded by, a secret departure of the heart from God.

It will also *console us in trouble*. David, both on this and many other occasions, found prayer the best means of composing his spirit when it was harassed by temptations or persecutions^m. And did any one ever apply this remedy in vain? When we have complained to man only, we have felt the pressure of our burthens still, and groaned under them as much as ever: but when we have carried our complaints to God, we have almost invariably had our murmurs silenced, our agitations tranquillized, our spirits comforted. God has fulfilled to us his promise, "Call upon me in the time of trouble, and I will hear thee, and thou shalt glorify meⁿ."

ⁱ Ps. lxiv. 5.

^k 1 Pet. i. 5.

^l Ps. iv. 4.

^m ver. 3, 13, 17. See also Ps. lxix. 17, 18. and cxvi. 3—5.

ⁿ Ps. l. 15.

It will moreover *strengthen us for duty*. We should not so often faint in the way of duty, if we waited more constantly upon our God. He “would renew our strength as the eagle’s^o :” he would “give us more grace^p,” even “grace sufficient for us.” However weak we are in ourselves, we should be “able to do all things through the strength which he would impart unto us^q.” By drawing nigh to God, our humility is increased, our faith invigorated, our hope quickened, our love inflamed, and the whole work of grace advanced in our souls.

Lastly, it will *prepare us for glory*. Nothing transforms us into the Divine image so much as communion with God. When Moses continued with God for a season upon the holy mount, his face contracted a radiance which was visible to all who beheld him. And, though no bright effulgence will now adorn the countenances of those who live nigh to God, yet a glory will shine around their paths, a lustre which will compel others to “take notice of them, that they have been with Jesus^r.” By “beholding his glory they will be changed into the same image^s,” and be progressively fitted to “see him as he is^t.”]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who never draw near to God at all—

[How many are there of this description! You rather say to him in your hearts, “Depart from us^u :” and, in so doing, you pass sentence upon yourselves: you even inflict on yourselves, by anticipation, the punishment prepared for you^x. God assures you, that “all who are far from him shall perish^y.” O that you might tremble at the denunciations of his wrath, and not bring upon yourselves the bitter experience of it in the eternal world!]

2. Those who draw nigh to him, but only in a formal manner—

[Your state is as dangerous and deplorable as if you lived ever so far from God: for it is to no purpose to “draw nigh to him with your lips, while your hearts are far from him^z.” “Bodily exercise profiteth nothing^a :” you must have “the power of godliness as well as the form^b.” “God is a Spirit: and, if you do not worship him in spirit and in truth^c,” your service is a mockery, and your hope a delusion. Be in earnest therefore in your walk with God: for as your formal duties,

^o Isai. xl. 31.

^p Jam. iv. 6.

^q Phil. iv. 13.

^r Acts iv. 13.

^s 2 Cor. iii. 18.

^t 1 John iii. 2.

^u Job xxi. 14.

^x Matt. xxv. 41.

^y ver. 27.

^z Matt. xv. 8, 9.

^a 1 Tim. iv. 8.

^b 2 Tim. iii. 5.

^c John iv. 24.

whether in the Church or closet, bring with them neither pleasure nor profit, so will they ultimately deceive you to your ruin. On the contrary, if you really draw nigh to God, and "stir up yourselves to lay hold of him," he will draw nigh to you, and load you with his richest benefits^d."]

3. Those who find their happiness in communion with God—

[This is the character of all the saints: "they are a people nigh unto God^e:" "truly their fellowship is with God, and with his Son Jesus Christ^f." It is true, that there is no merit in this; and it arises only from the grace of God, which effectually worketh in them: nevertheless God admires and applauds their conduct: viewing them with a kind of rapture and surprise, he says, "Who is this that hath engaged his heart to approach unto me^g?" Happy, happy are the people who can say, "Lord, it is I," "Lord, it is I." Continue then and increase your diligence in walking with God. Then you shall not only say *now*, "It is good for me to draw nigh to God;" but you shall one day add with ten-fold emphasis, "It is good for me to have drawn nigh to God:" yes; if *now* you can look back upon your seasons of communion with God as the best and happiest hours of your life, much more shall you, when your intercourse with him shall be more immediate, and you are dwelling in the very bosom of your God.]

^d Jam. iv. 8.

^e Ps. cxlviii. 14.

^f 1 John i. 3.

^g Jer. xxx. 21.

DCXXVIII.

GOD'S INTEREST IN HIS PEOPLE.

Ps. lxxiv. 22. *Arise, O God! plead thine own cause.*

NO one can have ever heard or read the account given us of Abraham's intercession for Sodom, without being struck with the condescension of God in suffering a poor sinful worm so to urge his requests as to make every fresh concession an occasion of still larger demands. Yet, methinks, the petition offered in my text is incomparably more bold than perhaps any other that was ever offered by fallen man.

In unfolding this petition, I will shew you,

I. That there is an identity of interests between God and his people—

This the psalm before us clearly proves—

[Great was the distress of God's people at the time it was written: they appear to have been forsaken of their God, and delivered over into the hands of their enemies. But the writer speaks, throughout the psalm, as if their cause was God's; and calls upon God to take it up altogether as his own: "O God, why hast thou cast us off for ever? why doth thine anger smoke against *the sheep of thy pasture?* Remember *thy congregation, which thou hast purchased of old;* the rod of *thine inheritance, which thou hast redeemed;* this Mount Zion, *wherein thou hast dwelt^a!*" "Have respect unto the Covenant^b." "Arise, O God! plead thine own cause." Who would imagine that this is the address of a sinner imploring mercy for himself and for his people? Yet such it is: and this clearly proves that God considers his people's cause as his own, and their interests as identified with his.]

The whole Scriptures also speak to the same effect—

[When the people murmured against Moses, he warned them that their murmuring was not against him, but against God himself^c. When the people of Israel desired to have no longer a judge, like Samuel, but a king, like other nations around them, Samuel told them, that it was not *him* that they had rejected, but *God*^d. The Prophet Zechariah confirms this, in terms peculiarly strong and energetic, when he represents God as saying to his oppressed people, "He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of mine eye^e." Our blessed Lord and Saviour speaks to the same effect; and so identifies himself with his people, that, whether they be benefited or injured, he considers it as done to himself. Is any poor servant of his clothed or fed or visited, Christ says, "In doing it to him, ye did it to ME^f." On the other hand, is any one of them oppressed, Christ feels the stroke as inflicted on himself: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou ME^g?"]

This being clear, I proceed to shew,

II. Whence this identity arises—

It arises,

1. From the relation in which they stand to God—

[In the psalm before us this is strongly marked. The Jewish nation being "his sheep," "his congregation," "his inheritance," was a reason why he should consider "their cause as his own." The whole people of Israel were accounted by God as "his portion and inheritance," and the more religious

^a ver. 1, 2.

^b ver. 20.

^c Exod. xvi. 8.

^d 1 Sam. viii. 7.

^e Zech. ii. 8.

^f Matt. xxv. 40.

^g Acts. ix. 4.

part of them as "his peculiar treasure" and "his jewels." Yea, he accounted himself as their Father, and them as his children. Now, is there a parent in the universe who, if his child were injured, would not account the injury as done to himself? We wonder not, then, that God should regard his children's cause as identified with his own.]

2. From the union which subsists between them and the Lord Jesus Christ—

[They have been "bought with the precious blood of Christ," who therefore considers them as "his own^h." And how near their union with him is, may be seen by the images under which it is described. He is "the foundation" on which they standⁱ, and consequently one with the superstructure built upon him. He is "the Husband" of his Church, and therefore one with his spouse^k. But the union is far closer than this: for "He is the vine, and they are the branches," vitally united to him, and deriving all their sap and nourishment from him^l. But neither does that come up to the full idea of our union with him: for "we are members of his body, even of his flesh and of his bones^m," yea, and are also "one Spirit with himⁿ," he being "the very life that liveth in us^o." In fact, there is no union with which it can be compared, but that which exists between the Father and Christ^p: and hence St. Paul calls the collective members of his body by the very name of Christ: "As the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, *so also is Christ^q*;" that is, so also is the Church of Christ, which is so identified with him, that it may well bear his very name. How can it be, then, but that he should make our cause his own?]

3. From the connexion which there is between their prosperity and his glory—

[When God threatened to extirpate Israel for their heinous provocations, Moses urged on God the consideration of his own glory, which would suffer, if that threat were carried into execution^r. On the other hand, God's honour is represented as greatly advanced by their welfare. If they flourish as "trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord^s," and "bring forth much fruit, God is glorified^t." Hence, in the book of Psalms, this consideration is urged with earnest importunity as a plea for speedy and effectual relief: "Help us, O God of our

^h 1 Cor. vi. 20.

ⁱ 1 Pet. ii. 4, 5.

^k Eph. v. 32.

^l John xv. 4, 5.

^m Eph. v. 30.

ⁿ 1 Cor. vi. 17.

^o Col. iii. 4. and Gal. ii. 20.

^p John xvii. 21.

^q 1 Cor. xii. 12.

^r Exod. xxxii. 11—13. Numb. xiv. 13—16.

^s Isai. lxi. 3.

^t John xv. 8.

salvation, *for the glory* of thy name; and deliver us, and purge away our sins *for thy name's sake*. Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is their God^u? In a word, as children by their conduct may reflect either honour or disgrace upon their parents according as that conduct may deserve, so God himself participates in the honour or disgrace of his people; "being blasphemed," when they violate their duty^x; and lauded, when they approve themselves faithful in the discharge of it^y.]

This point being clear, let us consider,

III. The use which we should make of it in our addresses at the throne of grace—

We should plead with God precisely as the Psalmist does in the words of our text. Whatever be the pressure under which we labour, whether it be from men or devils, we shall do well in offering up this prayer, "Arise, O God, and plead thine own cause."

[Let us suppose a person bowed down with a sense of sin, and an apprehension of God's heavy displeasure: Is that a case wherein this plea may be urged? Yes, assuredly; for so it was urged by the Church of old, in language peculiarly strong, and, I had almost said, presumptuous: "We acknowledge, O Lord, our wickedness, and the iniquity of our fathers: for we have sinned against thee. Do not abhor us, for thy name's sake; *do not disgrace the throne of thy glory*: remember, *break not thy covenant with us*^z." Precisely thus, however, may we also address the Father of mercies: for he has covenanted to receive all who come to him humbly in his Son's name; and if he should cast out one, he would violate his covenant, and "disgrace the throne of his glory" — — — In like manner, if we are suffering under persecution, we may come to God in this very manner, and entreat him to plead his own cause: "Plead my cause, O Lord, with them that strive with me: fight thou against them that fight against me. Take hold of shield and buckler, and stand up for mine help: draw out also the spear, and stop the way against them that persecute me: say unto my soul, I am thy salvation This thou hast seen, O Lord; keep not silence: O Lord, be not thou far from me! Stir up thyself, and awake to my judgment, even *unto my cause, my God, and my Lord*^a." There can be no situation whatever, where this plea is not proper; nor any in which it shall not prevail, if it be offered in humility and faith — — —]

^u Ps. lxxix. 9, 10.

^x Rom. ii. 4.

^y 1 Pet. iv. 14.

^z Jer. xiv. 20, 21.

^a Ps. xxxv. 1—3, 22, 23.

1. A word of caution, however, may not be unseasonable—

[It may be supposed, that, whilst we thus consider God as engaged to help us, we are at liberty to sit down in sloth and inactivity. But God will help those only who endeavour, as far as they are able, to help themselves. Hence, when the Church of old cried to him, “Awake, awake, O arm of the Lord! awake as in the ancient days, in the generations of old!” he replied, “Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem!” and again, “Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion^b!” The paralytic, notwithstanding his impotence, endeavoured to put forth his arm; and in that effort he was healed^c. And so also shall it be with us: let us labour to the uttermost to maintain our own cause, and God will then both make it his own, and plead it for us — — —]

2. A word of encouragement, at all events, must not be omitted—

[If God make our cause his own, what have we to fear? for “who can be against us, if He be for us?” Let our Saviour’s consolations in the depth of all his troubles be applied by you for the comfort of your own souls: “The Lord God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed. He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? let us stand together: who is mine adversary? let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord God will help me; who is he that shall condemn me? lo, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up^d.” Rely on God thus, and all will be well: for of “those who thus trust in God, not one shall ever be confounded.”]

^b Isai. li. 9, 17. and lii. 1. ^c Matt. xii. 13. ^d Isai. l. 7—9.

DCXXIX.

GOD GREATLY TO BE FEARED.

Ps. lxxvi. 7. *Thou, even thou, art to be feared: and who may stand in thy sight, when once thou art angry?*

THERE is not only a generally prevailing notion that God is merciful, but the consideration of his mercy is with many a ground and reason for dismissing from their minds all fear of his displeasure. But it is not in this partial view that the Deity is represented in the Scriptures of truth: on the contrary, the whole sacred records bear witness to

him as a God who is greatly to be feared. On many occasions has his indignation against sin and sinners been most awfully displayed; as when, in one single night, he slew one hundred and eighty-five thousand of the Assyrian army, who had besieged Jerusalem and defied his power. It was probably on that occasion that the psalm before us was written: and in reference to it was this testimony given, "Thou, even thou, art to be feared: and who may stand in thy sight, when thou art angry?" To establish and confirm this sentiment, is my purpose at this time.

I. To establish it—

But where shall I begin? or where shall I end? Of course, it is but a very partial view of this subject that can be presented in one discourse. Let us, however, notice,

1. What God is in himself—

[If we contemplate his *natural* perfections, we shall see this truth in very striking colours. He is *omnipresent*, so that we can never escape from him for a single moment. He is *omniscient*, so that there is not so much as a thought of our hearts which can be hidden from him. He is *omnipotent* also, to deal with men according to their deserts. His *moral* perfections, too, are well calculated to impress our minds with awe. So *holy* is he, that "he cannot behold iniquity" of any kind without the utmost abhorrence; and so *just*, that he cannot but enforce on men the observance of his laws, and execute his judgments upon them for every act of disobedience: and so unalterable is his *truth*, that sooner should heaven and earth pass away than one jot or tittle of his word should fail. Say, then, whether such a God be not greatly to be feared.]

2. What he has recorded respecting his dealings with mankind—

[Behold Adam in Paradise: he violated the command which had been given him respecting the forbidden tree: and how was he dealt with? The curse of God came upon him instantly; and he was driven from Paradise, and with all his posterity subjected to misery both in this world and the world to come. See the whole race of mankind after they had multiplied and filled the earth: they had provoked God to anger by their abominations: and he swept them all, with every living creature, from the face of the earth, a remnant only in the ark excepted, by an universal deluge. Trace the Deity at subsequent periods; his judgments upon Sodom and all the

cities of the plain; his wonders in Egypt; his judgments on all his own chosen people in the wilderness; his extirpation of all the nations that inhabited the land of Canaan: in a word, see his dealings either with nations or individuals, and you must come speedily to this same conclusion, that he is a God very greatly to be feared.]

3. What he has taught us to expect at his hands—

[He has told us plainly, that “the wicked shall be turned into hell, even all the nations that forget God^a.” He has said, that “he will rain upon them snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest; and that this shall be their portion to drink^b.” And what is the feeling which such declarations should inspire? Even in heaven itself they connect with these views the fear of God; saying, “Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints! Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name^c?”]

Plain and undeniable as this sentiment is, I will nevertheless proceed,

II. To confirm it—

Here is an appeal to every child of man; “Who shall stand before God, when once he is angry?”

Indeed, God *is* angry with those who are disobedient to his laws—

[Of course, we are not to conceive of God as under the influence of such a feeling as we call anger: but he will surely act, in reference to sinners, as men do against those who have excited their displeasure; and this we call a manifestation of his anger. To this effect the Psalmist speaks: “God is angry with the wicked every day. If he turn not, he will whet his sword: he hath bent his bow, and made it ready: he hath also prepared for him the instruments of death^d.”]

And who may stand in his sight, when once his anger is excited?

[Not even the angels in heaven could abide his wrath, when once they had kindled his indignation against them: how much less, then, can *man*, who is crushed before the moth^e! Shall it be thought that any man is so holy, as not to deserve God’s anger? Vain imagination! fatal conceit! “There is no man that liveth and sinneth not.” “In many things we all offend^f:” and “if any man say he hath not sinned, he maketh

^a Ps. ix. 17.

^b Ps. xi. 6. See also Rev. xiv. 9—11.

^c Rev. xv. 3, 4.

^d Ps. vii. 11—13.

^e 2 Pet. ii. 4.

^f James iii. 2.

God a liar^g." Even Job himself says, "If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me: if I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse^h." But possibly it may be thought that God will never proceed to extremities with all the human race; and that, consequently, if we are as good as the generality, we have nothing to fear. This, however, is a fatal delusion: for already is death inflicted upon all as the wages of sin; and on all who die in impenitence and unbelief will his ulterior judgments fall, even the destruction of body and soul in hell."]

APPLICATION—

1. Let the ungodly, then, seek reconciliation with God—

[Indeed, indeed, ye have angered the Most High God, all ye who have lived to yourselves and not to him. But is there no way of reconciliation with him? Yes, blessed be his name! he has given his only dear Son to bear your sins in his own body on the tree, and to effect reconciliation for you through the blood of his Cross. Yes, and he has given to us the ministry of reconciliation, and commissioned us to proclaim, that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." Happy are we, Brethren, to announce, that, however ye may have angered God in past times, ye may yet find mercy with him through the Son of his love. In the name of Christ himself, then, we address you; and in his stead we beseech you all, "Be ye reconciled to Godⁱ."]

2. Let the godly forbear to anger him any more—

[Though God will be merciful to his repentant people, he will not spare any who shall live in sin. No: he commandeth "every one that nameth the name of Christ to depart from iniquity." And so far will he be from overlooking sin in his professing people, that he has declared, "His judgments shall begin with them^k:" "You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities^l." Presume not, then, upon your being in his favour, as though that would preserve you from his judgments: for I tell you, that of all who came out of Egypt, two only were suffered to enter into the land of Canaan: and the only evidence of real friendship with God, is the keeping of God's commandments, and the doing unreservedly whatsoever is pleasing in his sight^m."]

^g 1 John i. 10.

^h Job ix. 20.

ⁱ 2 Cor. v. 18—20.

^k 1 Pet. iv. 17.

^l Amos iii. 2.

^m John xv. 14.

DCXXX.

DESPONDENCY DEPICTED AND REPROVED.

Ps. lxxvii. 7—10. *Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? And I said, this is my infirmity: but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High.*

IT pleases God to deal with men in a great variety of ways: some, in their *bodies*, experience scarce any pain or sickness till the period of their dissolution; whilst others know little of health or ease through the greatest part of their lives. In like manner, the *souls* of some enjoy an almost uninterrupted course of peace and prosperity; whilst others are made to pass through deep waters, and to sustain fiery trials during a great part of their earthly pilgrimage. It is of these last that we propose at this time to speak. The afflictions of Asaph were certainly exceeding heavy: and the account, which in the preceding verses he gives of himself, shews, that he may well be considered as a mirror, wherein the Lord's people in all ages may, under their several temptations, behold the workings of their own minds. Scarcely any one can experience a sorer temptation than his^a. When he wrote this psalm, he was brought through it^b: but he tells us faithfully, what were his views and feelings under it. He sought the Lord without intermission; but found no comfort^c: his very recollections of God's character contributed only to augment his grief^d. To such a degree was his spirit oppressed, that he was deprived of all rest by night, and of all power of friendly communication by day; and he altogether sunk under his trouble^e. In vain did he call to mind the consolations he had enjoyed under former trials^f, or examine to find the causes of this peculiar dispensation^g: he thought surely that

^a He seems to have been that Asaph who was contemporary with David.

^b ver. 1.

^c ver. 2.

^d ver. 3.

^e ver. 3, 4.

^f ver. 5, 6.

^g ver. 6.

God himself must have changed, and have cast off that character, which, in appearance at least, he had on all former occasions exhibited: yea, his darling attributes of mercy and truth seemed to have undergone a change, and to have assumed an aspect totally different from that in which they had hitherto been viewed^h.

Happily, however, the snare was broken; and he saw, that these hard thoughts of God had no foundation in truth: they were the result only of his own weaknessⁱ; and would be effectually removed by a more attentive consideration of all that God had done for his people of old^k.

His temptation was at its height, when he asked the questions recorded in our text. We shall do well therefore to consider,

I. What these questions import—

They are not to be viewed as subjects of a merely speculative inquiry, but to be taken in connexion with all that agitation of mind that is depicted in the foregoing context. In this view they express,

1. Disquieting apprehensions in reference to himself—

[He had thought in former times, that he was a monument of God's "mercy," and an object of his "favourable" regard: but now he seems as one cast out, and doomed to everlasting misery. It must be remembered, that interrogations, which in our language would imply a negation of the thing inquired about, have frequently in Scripture the force of affirmations^l: and thus it is in the various questions that are before us, in which therefore there is a very strong degree of apprehension intimated. Yet is this feeling by no means uncommon at the present day. Many in a season of darkness are led to write bitter things against themselves, and to account all their past profession a continued scene of hypocrisy and self-delusion. They think that they have resisted the Spirit, till they have utterly quenched his sacred motions; yea, that they have committed the sin against the Holy Ghost, and placed themselves, as it were, out of the reach of mercy: and such an unhappy degree of positiveness frequently accompanies these apprehensions, that they read their doom as if it had

^h ver. 7—9.

ⁱ ver. 10.

^k ver. 10—20.

^l Jer. ii. 14. and xxxi. 20.

been already past, and disregard all means of grace as though it were utterly in vain to use them.]

2. Desponding fears in reference to God—

[He properly referred every thing to God as the one source of all good: but instead of deriving comfort from this, he made it an occasion of increased despondency. And thus it is with many: “They remember God, and are troubled.” Every attribute of the Deity is brought against them, to aggravate their guilt and ensure their condemnation. Even mercy and truth are regarded by them as arrayed in hostile attitude against them, and as uniting their influence on the side of offended justice. His paternal corrections are considered by them as judicial inflictions, and as the forerunners of yet heavier judgments in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone. His delays in answering prayer are viewed as absolute refusals, and as decisive proofs of final dereliction. Hence their fears are vented in terms similar to those in the passage before us^m.]

An apprehension of the true import of these questions will enable us to discover,

II. Whence they proceed—

Justly did Asaph say, “This is my infirmity:” and a grievous infirmity it was. Such questions as his arise,

1. From impatience—

[There is great impatience in the mind of man, yea, even of good men, and especially under any dark and mysterious dispensation. We are apt to think that God is, as it were, bound to hear us, and to interpose, either for the solution of our difficulties, or the removal of our trials, as soon as we call upon him. We cannot wait his leisure. Like Saul, we think he has forgotten us; and, that our enemies will crush us, before he can come to our reliefⁿ. Thus David was exercised, as he himself tells us: “I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes^o.” To such a degree was he agitated on one occasion, that he declared, it was altogether in vain that he had served God: “Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency^p.” And, as for all that God’s saints had spoken from the beginning of the world respecting the grace and mercy and fidelity of God, he did not hesitate to pronounce it all a downright falsehood: “I said in my haste, all men are liars^q.” The Prophet Jeremiah, too, cast reflections even upon God himself, as having deceived him by false promises; “Thou

^m Lam. iii. 17, 18. ⁿ 1 Sam. xiii. 12, 13. ^o Ps. xxxi. 22.

^p Ps. lxxiii. 13, 21.

^q Ps. cxvi. 11.

hast deceived me, and I was deceived^r." Alas! what a root of bitterness is an impatient spirit! and how greatly does it aggravate the calamities under which we suffer! Surely we should leave times and seasons, whether of trial or consolation, unto God, and say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him^s."

2. From unbelief—

[This is the great source of all our disquietude. If we truly believe that God ordered every thing with infallible wisdom, and unbounded goodness, and an inviolable fidelity, we could never be put into such a consternation as is expressed in our text. We should rather lie as clay in his hands; and leave him to fashion us according to his will, and to put us into as many successive furnaces as he sees fit, and to accomplish his own purposes in his own way. We should have it fixed as an immutable principle in our minds, that though "clouds and darkness may be round about him, justice and judgment are the basis of his throne:" and under the influence of this faith, we should adopt the language of the Prophet Habakkuk, and say, "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stall; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation^t."]]

Happily the same authority that points out the source of these questions, shews us also,

III. How they should be answered—

Would we know what God *will do*, we should attentively consider what he *hath done*. We should mark his wonders of old, and observe all the diversified exercises of his perfections towards his people from the beginning of the world, and especially towards the Israelites whom he redeemed from the land of Egypt:

1. How mighty his power!

[When the moment for the deliverance of his people was arrived, not all the power of Egypt could detain them. Difficulties indeed were multiplied, but only for the purpose of displaying more gloriously his power in their behalf. The Red Sea obstructed their flight; but it opened at God's command, and made for his people a passage on dry ground; and then closed again to overwhelm their enemies. Their necessities in the wilderness were such as no human power or wisdom could supply: but this also only tended in the same manner to

^r Jer. xx. 7.

^s Job xiii. 15.

^t Hab. iii. 17, 18.

proclaim His might, who for the space of forty years fed them with bread from heaven, and with water out of the stony rock, and caused their garments never to decay. Be it so then, that our difficulties are great, yea, insuperable by human power: then will God magnify towards us his power so much the more, and shew, that still, as in former times, he “makes the depths of the sea (not a place for his people to be drowned in, but) a way for the ransomed to pass over^u.”]

2. How rich his mercy!

[Truly it was “not for their righteousness that he brought them out; for they were a stiff-necked people” from the very beginning: and “many a time would he have consumed them for their iniquities, but for his own name’s sake, that it should not be dishonoured among the heathen.” See their murmurings, their idolatries, their innumerable provocations, and then say, whether God’s grace be not sovereign, and his mercy infinite? And, if such surmises as those suggested in our text arise in our minds respecting him, let us remember, that he is the same God now as in former ages, and that now, as well as in former times, the very chief of sinners, if truly penitent, shall be accepted of him; and that “where sin has abounded, his grace shall much more abound^x.”]

3. How mysterious his ways!

[In the space of a few months God had brought his people to the borders of Canaan; and yet for their murmuring and unbelief he turned them back into the wilderness, and caused them to wander there forty years, till all that generation, excepting two persons, were swept away. This was most mysterious: yet are we told on infallible authority, that “He led them by *the right way*.” In truth, that dispensation has afforded the richest instruction to the Church from that period to the present hour, and will continue to do so to the end of time: and it will be found that his darkest dispensations towards us also are the most replete with instruction to our souls. It is usually those who are most exercised with trials, that know most of themselves, and most of God. Whenever therefore his dealings with us appear strange and inexplicable, let us compose our minds with the reflection suggested toward the close of this psalm, “Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known^y.”]

4. How sure his promises!

[He had pledged himself to Abraham, that he would bring his posterity into the full possession of the Promised Land: and, though for their iniquities he caused all who came out of

^u Isai. li. 10.

^x Rom. v. 20.

^y Isai. li. 10.

Egypt to die in the wilderness, yet he brought their children, who they supposed would fall an easy prey to their enemies, into that good land, and gave it them for their inheritance: and so perfectly did he fulfil his word to them in every respect, that Joshua after many years could appeal to the whole nation, that “not one thing had failed of all the good things which the Lord their God had spoken concerning them; all was come to pass unto them, and not one thing had failed thereof^z.” Thus, if the thought arise in our hearts, “Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore?” our answer must be, “No:” “it is impossible for God to lie^a.” “his promises in Christ are all yea, and amen^b.” and “his mercy endureth for ever^c.”]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are walking in darkness—

[There are changes in the spiritual, as well as in the natural world. We must not any of us expect that our sun shall shine equally at all times with unclouded splendour. Notwithstanding we may truly “fear God and obey the voice of his servants, we may yet be walking in darkness and have no light.” But in that state we are directed what to do: we must “trust in the Lord, and stay upon our God^d.” The longest night will have an end: and if we wait patiently upon our God, “his way is prepared as the morning,” which, though the night appear exceeding long and tedious, will come at last^e. He may for wise reasons hide his face from us for a time; but it shall not be for ever^f. Hear his own answer to the complaints which we are apt to make^g — — — And know, that though “heaviness may endure for a night, joy shall surely come to us in the morning^h.” if only we wait till the appointed hour, “our light shall rise in obscurity, and our darkness shall be as the noon dayⁱ.”]

2. Those who enjoy the light of God’s countenance—

[O what a privilege, what an unspeakable blessing, is this! Learn to value it aright: and take care that you do not presume upon the mercy vouchsafed unto you. Do not be saying with David, “My mountain stands strong, I shall never be moved,” lest you provoke “God to hide his face from you, and you be troubled^k.” A slavish fear is doubtless to be avoided on the one hand; but so is a presumptuous security on the other. The true medium is, to “rejoice with trembling^l,” and

^z Josh. xxiii. 14.

^c Ps. cxxxvi. 1—26.

^f Isai. liv. 7, 8.

ⁱ Isai. lviii. 10.

^a Heb. vi. 18.

^d Isai. l. 10.

^g Isai. xlix. 14—16.

^k Ps. xxx. 7.

^b 2 Cor. i. 20.

^e Hos. vi. 3.

^h Ps. xxx. 5.

^l Ps. ii. 11.

to unite “the fear of the Lord with the comforts of the Holy Ghost^m.” Be watchful then, that you do not by any unhallowed dispositions “grieve the Holy Spiritⁿ,” but endeavour to “walk in the fear of the Lord all the day long^o.”]

^m Acts ix. 31.

ⁿ Eph. iv. 30.

^o Prov. xxiii. 17.

DCXXXI.

JEWS AND CHRISTIANS COMPARED.

Ps. lxxviii. 8. *A generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God.*

HISTORY is universally considered as a source of the most valuable instruction, since it sets before us the actions of men, under all the most important circumstances of life, and teaches us what to avoid, and what to follow. But in this point of view the inspired history is of incomparably greater value than any other, because it portrays the conduct of men under an infinitely greater variety of circumstances than any other history can do, and does it also with far greater truth and certainty. Its importance in this respect is strongly marked by the Psalmist in the preceding context. He calls on the whole Jewish nation to listen to him, whilst he sets before them the dealings of Jehovah with their ancestors, and their conduct towards him: and he charges them to impart the information to their children, in order to its being transmitted through successive generations to their latest posterity; that all might learn their obligations to God, and be instructed to avoid the evils into which their ancestors had fallen: “that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments: and might not be, as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God.”

With a view to a similar improvement of the subject for ourselves, I will point out,

I. The character of that generation—

To estimate this aright, we must consider what might reasonably have been expected of them—

[No nation under heaven were ever so distinguished by the Divine favour as they. The wonders that were wrought for them in Egypt—their passage through the Red Sea, in which the enemies who followed them were drowned—their being guided by a cloud which afforded them shade by day, and light by night—their being nourished for forty years by bread from heaven, and by water, which, issuing from a rock, followed them in all their way—their having the Law written by the finger of God himself given them, together with laws and ordinances for the political and religious government of their nation—their having the river Jordan open a passage for them as the sea had formerly done—the seven nations, greater and mightier than they, all subdued before them—the promised land in due time put into their possession; and the worship of God, with all its attendant privileges and blessings, established amongst them—these were favours peculiar to that nation, and elevated them above all other people upon the face of the earth. Respecting their superior obligations to love and serve God on account of these things, Moses made an appeal to their forefathers, which appeal may still be made to their descendants at the present day^a — — —

Now, I ask, what might reasonably be expected of a people so favoured? Might it not be supposed, that they would love their God supremely, and cleave to him steadfastly, and trust in him confidently, and serve him with their whole hearts? One would think it impossible that they should do otherwise, if we did not know that]

The very reverse of this characterized their whole deportment—

[Their whole history from the beginning records one continued series of murmurings and rebellions. In Egypt itself, and within a few days after their passage through the Red Sea—but how shall I recite all their provocations? I must recite their whole history, if I would bring before you the full extent of their wickedness. Now and then they seemed to manifest a better spirit. When they saw all their enemies dead upon the sea-shore, they began to sing praise to their almighty Deliverer: and on some occasions, when he punished them for their rebellions, they manifested some contrition, and promised to amend^b — — — But they soon returned to their former habits, and “turned aside like a deceitful bow,” which, when promising to carry the arrow to the mark, causes it to drop at your very feet^c. At no time did they evince any real desire “to set their heart aright;” and, when they professed any such purpose, they soon forgot their engagements, and shewed, that “their spirit was not steadfast with their God.”]

^a Deut. iv. 32—35.

^b ver. 34—37.

^c ver. 57.

Now from having so complete a knowledge of them, we are ready to imagine, that they were as far beyond all others in depravity as they were in their privileges. But, that we may do justice to the character of that generation, let us proceed to consider,

II. The character of ours—

The favours conferred on us are as superior to any bestowed on them as it is possible to conceive—

[Their redemption was from oppressive task-masters; but ours is from sin and Satan, death and hell. Theirs was accomplished by power only; ours by a price surpassing all calculation, even the inestimably precious blood of God's only-begotten Son. Theirs was for a time in the earthly Canaan; ours for eternity in heaven. Theirs was a mere shadow; ours is the substance — — —]

What then may not reasonably be expected of us?

[Suppose we could divest ourselves of all recollection that we were a party concerned in this matter, and were called upon to give our opinion, how any people, so favoured as we have been, might be expected to requite their heavenly Benefactor; what answer should we give? Should we not say, There will be no bounds to their gratitude: they will adore their God day and night: they will almost grudge a moment that is not spent in his praise: they will commit all their concerns to him with a confidence which nothing can shake; and devote themselves to him with an ardour which nothing can abate: they will be wholly his, in body, soul, and spirit; and will look for his presence and his blessing as the only portion of their souls? — — —]

And how is it with us?

[How is it *with the generality*? Do they “set their heart aright” towards him? Is there in their hearts any real determination to live *to* him, and *for* him, as their rightful Lord and Master? Is there any decided purpose to secure at all events an interest in that redemption which he has wrought out for them; and to live entirely on Him, who has lived and died for them? — — — Let me rather ask, Is there any concern about their *heart* at all? Provided only they be moral in their lives, and regular in their attendance on ordinances, do they not think themselves at liberty to set their affections on things below, instead of reserving them exclusively for things above? See, in their converse with the world, how little they savour of heaven and heavenly things! See them even in their religious worship, (whether in the closet, or the family, or the public assembly,) how cold and formal all their services

are; performed from a sense of duty, rather than from inclination; and with a view to satisfy their conscience, rather than to enjoy and glorify their God! In a word, instead of pointing like the needle to the pole, their heart rests indifferently in any other position than the right; and never, unless from some forcible impulse, and for a moment, points towards God as its rest at all.

And how is it with the greater part of *those who profess godliness*? As the former “set not their heart aright,” so these “in their spirit are not steadfast with God.” What lamentable instability is found in many who embrace the Gospel as a system, and number themselves amongst the Israel of God! They “name the name of Christ; but depart not from iniquity:” they “profess to know him; but in works deny him:” they “have a name to live; but are really dead:” or, if they “run well, it is only for a season;” they are soon diverted from their course; they are drawn aside by temptation; and though they “begin in the Spirit, they end in the flesh.” Thus it was in the Apostle’s days: and thus we are taught to expect it will be in every age, till that blessed period shall arrive, when “all nations shall serve the Lord,” and “the Canaanite no more be found in the house of the Lord of hosts.” The good-ground hearers are but few, in comparison of those whose unfruitfulness or instability disappoint the efforts of the labourer. Discontent with respect to what God has done, and distrust as to what he will do; a love of present gratifications, and a contempt of future good; a renunciation of God himself for base and worthless idols; are not evils peculiar to that generation: they exist and operate amongst ourselves with undiminished force; and in the conduct of the Israelites we have a mirror, wherein we may see our own faces, with the exception of a few who serve God in spirit and in truth. There is indeed, thanks be unto God! “a generation of righteous” persons, who are truly “upright,” and truly “blessed^d.” But, for the most part, the present generation has little reason to boast against that which is mentioned in our text: yea rather, inasmuch as our privileges exceed theirs, and our obligations to holiness are greater, it may well be doubted whether we are not more criminal than they; and whether they in the day of judgment will not rise up against us and condemn us.]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are satisfied with themselves—

[We are told that “there is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, but are not washed from their filthiness^e.” Yes, thousands are well satisfied with themselves on account of their outward morality, though they have no real spirituality

^d Ps. xiv. 5. and cxii. 2.

^e Prov. xxx. 12.

of mind, no entire devotedness of heart to God. But let it be remembered, that "God looketh not at the outward appearance, but at the heart:" he "requireth truth in the inward parts." And to the heart must we also look: for "as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." I mean not that we should take no notice of our actions; because if they be bad, our hearts must of necessity be bad also; since it is "out of the abundance of the heart that we both speak" and act. But actions, though good in appearance, will not suffice to prove our integrity before God. By the heart alone he judges: (acts are regarded only as proofs and evidences of our state:) and according as that is found upright or hypocritical before him, will our sentence at his tribunal be. Let us then look well to the truth of our profession, and to the stability of our ways. Let us see to it, that our "heart is set aright" to glorify his name, and that our spirit is steadfast with him, whatever temptations or difficulties be put in our way. For then only "have we a good hope," when we are "Israelites indeed, and without guile^f."]

2. Those who are conscious of their departures from God—

[To see that we have erred from his ways is the first step towards a return to him. If you see then a resemblance between yourselves and the Jews of old, be thankful that "God has not yet sworn in his wrath that you shall not enter into his rest." And without delay flee to the Saviour, "whose blood will cleanse you from all sin." Yet be not content to have your sins forgiven. When you pray with David, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean," "wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow," forget not to add, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me!" "The old heart must be taken away, and a new heart be given you," before you can enter into the kingdom of heaven. You must be born again, and become "new creatures in Christ Jesus." You must become the very reverse of what the world are, regarding God, as they regard the world; and the world, as they regard their God. When they are in holy exercises, they are quite out of their element: but when engaged in worldly pursuits or company, they are quite at home. Be ye, on the contrary, strangers in the world, and at home with God. Let your whole life and conversation testify for you, whose you are, and whom you serve: and then will God acknowledge you as his in the eternal world.]

^f John i. 47.

DCXXXII.

THE EVIL OF UNBELIEF.

Ps. lxxviii. 19—22. *They spake against God: they said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness? Behold, he smote the rock, that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed; can he give bread also? can he provide flesh for his people? Therefore the Lord heard this, and was wroth: so a fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also came up against Israel; because they believed not in God, and trusted not in his salvation.*

HUMAN nature is the same in all ages. On a comparison of ourselves with the ancient Jews, we are ready to suppose that we are better than they. But, if we were subjected to the same trials as they, and as faithful a record were kept of all the workings of our hearts, I doubt not but that our incorrigible perverseness would be found to equal theirs.

This murmuring of theirs will lead me to shew,

I. The evil of unbelief—

Unbelief often assumes the garb of humility. But the evil of it appears,

1. From the construction which God himself has put upon it—

[He says, “They spake against God,” when they questioned his power to give them flesh. And this is what we do, whensoever we call in question God’s power to effect any thing which our necessities require. He has declared himself to be possessed of all power in heaven and in earth: “I am the Almighty God^a.” But when we limit his power, we represent him as unworthy of credit; or, as St. John strongly expresses it, “We make him a liar^b.” We may not *intend* to cast this reflection upon him; but *we do it*; and, in fact, reduce him to a level with his creatures.

As for our acknowledgments of his past interpositions, these aggravate, rather than excuse, our doubts of his power; since they are standing witnesses for him: and our doubts are entertained in direct opposition to their testimony. Let us not, therefore, imagine that the giving of glory to God for past favours will at all palliate our refusal of credit to him for the future: for, on the contrary, he will rather say to us, “Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou calumniator of thy God.”]

^a Gen. xvii. 1.

^b 1 John v. 10.

2. From the indignation which he manifested on account of it—

[“ When he heard these unbelieving doubts, he was wroth: and so a fire was kindled in Jacob, and anger also came up against Israel,” and “ he smote them with a very great and fatal plague^c.” Now, it is true, we do not see the same displeasure exercised on us; but we can have no doubt but that our unbelief is as offensive to God as theirs was: indeed, it involves us in deeper guilt; because his mercies to us, in our redemption by Christ, infinitely exceed all which the Jews experienced in the wilderness. And, if we still harbour it in our hearts, it will bring down a proportionably heavier judgment than what theirs brought on them. They were excluded from the earthly Canaan for their unbelief: but we shall be excluded from heaven itself, and from the everlasting enjoyment of our God^d.”]

Seeing, then, that unbelief is so offensive to him, let us inquire after,

II. The disposition of mind which God approves—

This is clearly intimated in our text: His anger was kindled against Israel, “ because they believed not in God, and trusted not in his salvation.” Of all the images that human wisdom can suggest, no one can be devised so complete as that before us, for the purpose of illustrating a life of faith—

[The people of Israel were brought out of Egypt; but they knew not one step of the way that they were to take: they were unprovided with any sustenance: they were incapable of protecting themselves against any enemy: they had to pass through a country infested with wild beasts, and full of obstacles apparently insurmountable: consequently, they had to trust to God for every thing from day to day; and, in dependence upon him, to expect a successful termination of their labours in a peaceful enjoyment of the Promised Land. A new-born infant was not more incapable of providing for itself than they: yet were they to prosecute their journey without fear, and without any apprehension respecting its final issue. Now this is precisely the frame of mind which God expects from us. We must feel our dependence on him as much as they did. We must look to him in every difficulty; and expect from him a supply of every want; and never move, but as guided and directed by him. If trials arise, they must drive us all to him, and lead us to expect from him the more

^c Numb. xi. 33.

^d Heb. iii. 19. and iv. 1, 11.

visible manifestations of his power and love. If he delay, we must wait his time: if he appear for a time to have forgotten us, we must regard it only as a call to give him a more abundant measure of glory, by a full persuasion, that “in the mount of difficulty he will be seen;” and that, though he were to suffer us all to perish, he would rather raise us up again from the dead than fail to accomplish any one of his promises. Such was Abraham’s faith; and such should be ours also^e: and “sooner shall heaven and earth pass away” than one such Believer ever fall short of the promised inheritance.]

And now let me ADDRESS,

1. The querulous—

[Alas! to what an awful degree has discontent raged in our hearts, under circumstances of trial; so that we have dared to question, not only the willingness, but even the power, of God to relieve us! Nay, we have even, like Jonah, vindicated our complaints, and thought that “we did well to be angry.” But remember, Brethren, that God is the disposer of all events: and, whilst you vent your rage against those who may have been accessory to your troubles, your murmuring is in reality against God. Beware, I pray you, lest you provoke him to anger, and bring down upon your souls his heavy displeasure. Your wisdom and your duty is, under every affliction, to “be silent before God,” or to say, “It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good.”]

2. The doubting—

[You do not well to limit the mercies of your God. “Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall *I* have a child, who am old^f?” And wherefore do you suffer any difficulties to shake your confidence in God? “Is there any thing too hard for the Lord?” Peter, when he saw the waves, began to sink through fear. But our Lord reproved him, saying, “O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” So then I say to you, Look only to the promises: and think not whether they be more or less difficult of accomplishment: but take them; plead them; rest on them; expect the fulfilment of them: and be assured, that “not one thing shall fail, of all the good things which the Lord your God has promised to you^g.” “Faithful is He that hath called you; who also will do it^h.”]

3. The true believer—

[“Hold fast your confidence in God.” This will bring peace unto your souls, and will give glory to your God. Of all the graces that have been ever exercised by the Lord’s

^e Heb. xi. 17—19. ^f Gen. xviii. 12, 13. ^g Josh. xxiii. 14.

^h 1 Thess. v. 24.

people, no one has been so much noticed, and so highly applauded by him, as faith. Even when as bright an assemblage of graces as ever were united, were called forth into exercise by the penitent Mary, nothing but her faith was noticed by our Lord: "Thy faith hath saved thee: go in peaceⁱ." In fact, as it is that which, more than any other grace, honours God, that beyond every other shall be honoured by him. "Be strong then in faith, giving glory to God;" and "according to your faith it shall be unto you."]

ⁱ Luke vii. 50.

DCXXXIII.

OBSTINACY IN SIN REPROVED.

Ps. lxxviii. 32. *For all this, they sinned still.*

THE history of the Israelites in the wilderness should not be considered as the history of that people only, but of human nature in general. In this view, it is pre-eminently instructive; because it serves as a mirror, to reflect our own persons, and to shew us what is actually passing in our own hearts. In illustration of this remark, I will set before you,

I. The state of Israel in the wilderness—

It is plainly depicted in the psalm before us. It was one continued contest between God and them; God endeavouring, by mercies and judgments, to reclaim them from their evil ways; and they determinately persisting in their rebellion against him.

1. They had begun their wickedness early—

[Whilst they were yet in Egypt, where, as might be supposed, they were led to commit idolatry, God had endeavoured to withdraw them from it. He had revealed himself to them as the God of their fathers; and had urged them to cast away their abominations and their idols. But they would not hearken unto him: on the contrary, so obstinately did they adhere to their idol worship, that, had it not been for his own great Name's sake, which would have been dishonoured among the heathen, God would have cut them off from being a nation, and have utterly destroyed them from the face of the earth^a. When Moses had clearly proved to them his divine mission to deliver them, they murmured at the delay which Pharaoh's obstinacy had created, and made their augmented trials an occasion of utter despondency^b. After all the wonders that had been wrought in Egypt before

^a Ezek. xx. 5—9.

^b Exod. v. 20, 21.

their eyes, and they were brought out with a high hand, no sooner did they see fresh perils arise, than they renewed their murmurings with augmented vehemence, and complained that they had been betrayed to their utter ruin^e. Nor did even the passage of the Red Sea, and the sight of all their enemies dead upon the sea-shore, cure them of this propensity: for they were a rebellious and stiff-necked people even to the end^d.]

2. They continued it with scarcely any intermission—

[For a little moment “they believed the words of God, and sang his praise^e,” but “they soon forgot his works^f,” and provoked him at the sea, even at the Red Sea^g.” Read their history, of which a summary is given in the psalm before us, and you will find it one continued series of murmurings and rebellions. Dissatisfied with the provision which God gave them in the wilderness, they invidiously contrasted with it the delicacies which they had enjoyed in Egypt, their flesh and fish, their leeks and onions, and expressed their doubt whether God *could* furnish them with such provisions as those^h: and, when God had done it in such profusion that it was not possible for them to consume it all, and at the same time had testified his abhorrence of their inordinate desires, they, instead of humbling themselves before him, continued impenitent, and, as my text expresses it, “for all this, they sinned stillⁱ.” They had not been three months in the wilderness before they even made a golden calf, and worshipped that as their deliverer. On some occasions, indeed, after signal judgments had been inflicted on them, they pretended to repent, and to turn unto God; but “their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant^k.” In truth, “they despised the pleasant land^l” which God had promised to them for an inheritance; and, in the issue, they provoked “him to swear in his wrath that they should never enter into his rest^m.”]

3. They were utterly irreclaimable by any dispensations, whether of mercy or of judgment—

[The mercies which God vouchsafed to them were innumerable; yet, “for all this, they sinned still.” The judgments also which he inflicted were most awful; but, “for all this, they sinned still.” In a word, they kept up the contest, till they all, with the exception of Caleb and Joshua, were utterly consumed.]

And can any parallel to this be found? Yes, indeed, it will be found in,

II. The state of the Christian Church at this day—

^c Exod. xiv. 11, 12.

^d Deut. ix. 7.

^e Ps. cvi. 12.

^f Ps. cvi. 13.

^g Ps. cvi. 7.

^h ver. 19, 20.

ⁱ ver. 27—32.

^k ver. 34—37.

^l Ps. cvi. 24.

^m Ps. xciv. 11.

1. *Our guilt* resembles theirs—

[The sins of Israel may be comprehended under these two, ingratitude and unbelief. And let me ask, Are not these sins as prevalent amongst ourselves as ever they were in the days of Israel? Are not we loaded with benefits, even as they were? What conveniences had they, which are not showered down on us? It matters not whether our food be rained down from the clouds, or raised up from the earth: here it is, and we gather it, and have the calls of nature satisfied. The providence of God, if less visibly displayed towards us, is not a whit less careful of us, nor is his goodness towards us less manifest to the eye of faith. But where do we find hearts duly sensible of his tender mercy? Where do we find persons rendering to him the honour due unto his name? Where do we find persons, under circumstances of trial, able to repose their confidence in God, and with peaceful resignation expecting his gracious and seasonable interposition? Where do we find that his word forms such a ground of affiance, as to supersede all doubts and fears respecting the final issue of events? In a word, who amongst us is in the daily habit of acknowledging God in every thing, and of committing every thing to his disposal, and of living only to his glory? If our murmurings and discontent be less visible, they are not less real, when we cast the blame of our trials on second causes, instead of tracing them to that divine hand from whence they all proceed. And if, instead of living with heaven in our view, and proceeding towards that as our desired rest, we are occupied mainly with the things of time and sense, we are really in the state which we have before contemplated, and may see in the Israelites of old our own hateful deformity.]

2. *The gradations* of our guilt, too, are the same—

[They sinned—they sinned still—they sinned still, notwithstanding all that God could do to reclaim them. And what have we done from our youth up? In our earliest years, we no sooner began to act, than we began to violate the laws of God — — — As our reason became matured, it might be hoped that we should act in a way more suited to our profession, and more pleasing to God. But neither days nor years have made any difference in this respect: on the contrary, we have gone on adding iniquity to iniquity, in one continued series, even to the present hour: nor have any dispensations of God, whether in a way of mercy or of judgment, produced any permanent effect upon our minds. Now and then, perhaps, we may have felt a transient gleam of thankfulness on our minds, or some faint resolve to amend our ways: but both the one and the other have passed away without lasting benefit; and notwithstanding all God's efforts to reclaim us, we are still the same.]

3. *The aggravations of our guilt are greater far—*

[We have sinned *against greater light* than they. What knew they of the mind of God, in comparison with us? The poorest person in the midst of us is better informed than they: and, consequently, our violations of duty are proportionably heinous in the sight of God. We have sinned, too, *against richer mercies* than they. What is their redemption from Egypt in comparison of that which has been vouchsafed to us from sin and death? Theirs was *by power only*: but who can estimate the *price* that has been paid for us, even “the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spotⁿ?” They ate indeed of manna, and drank of water from the rock: but we have Christ himself, who is the true bread from heaven; and we have the Holy Spirit, whom Christ pours out abundantly upon us, for the refreshing of our thirsty souls. They had the guidance of the pillar and the cloud; but we have the word of God, which is both “a light to our feet in general, and a lantern to our paths,” for our direction and preservation, every step we take. We have sinned, also, *against stronger inducements* than they. To them was promised the enjoyment of the land of Canaan, as a land flowing with milk and honey; and the loss of it was threatened as the punishment of disobedience. But heaven and hell are set before us; even heaven with all its glory, and hell with all its inconceivable terrors: the one, as the reward of our fidelity; the other, as the recompence of impenitence and unbelief. Say, then, whether the guilt of Israel can be compared with ours? and whether, whilst we are ready to cast reflections on the Jews of old as a race of unparalleled impiety, we have not reason to acknowledge ourselves their equals, or rather their superiors, in iniquity?]

But it is time that we descend from general views of this subject, to a PERSONAL APPLICATION of it. Permit me, then, to ask of you individually,

1. What is your state at this time?

[You have seen what the state of Israel was: and you know, by the state of Caleb and Joshua, what it ought to have been. Now, has your state resembled theirs? Are you “following the Lord fully?” Have you searched out the Promised Land, and brought from thence the grapes of Eschol? and are you bearing your testimony before all, that it is the duty of every man to go up and possess the land? Are you exercising faith in God, as able to put down your enemies, and as pledged to bring you into possession of your promised inheritance? Is there a wide difference between the unbelieving

ⁿ 1 Pet. i. 19.

world and you, so that to the whole camp of Israel you are patterns of courage and fidelity^o? Be assured, your conduct must resemble theirs: your faith, your hope, your love, your zeal, must operate to the production of a life like theirs, if you would attain the same testimony from God, and the same happy issue of your labours——]

2. What will your state very shortly be ?

[Death is spreading its desolations far and wide; and, whether by sweeping judgments or a more silent process, is terminating the career of thousands; so that in the space of forty years a whole generation, as it were, passes away from the face of the earth. But do all go to one place? O! could we but follow the spirits of departed men into the presence of their God, as we follow their bodies to the grave, what scenes should we behold? In some happy cases, we should behold them seated on thrones of glory, and crowned with immortal bliss: but in how many cases should we see them hurled from the tribunal of their God into the bottomless abyss of hell, and cast for ever into the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone—sad monuments of human folly, and objects of God's everlasting wrath and indignation! Indeed, my Brethren, this is no vain conceit; it is a reality: it is an event that is taking place every moment; and in the space of another day may be realized in you. Is it not time for you to inquire, whether you have turned unfeignedly to God, as reconciled to you in the Son of his love; or whether you are "sinning still^p?"—— Remember, that "the goodness and patience and long-suffering of God, which have been so long exercised towards you, are intended to bring you to repentance^q." I pray you, despise not these mercies, as the Israelites did in the wilderness, and as thousands around us do: but "to-day, whilst it is yet called to-day," bear in mind the doom that befel them, lest "ye also, having the same promise of entering into God's rest, should at last come short of it^r."]

^o Numb. xxxii. 12.

^p Here the particular dispensation, whether of war, famine, pestilence, sudden death, or any other calamity, may be urged as a call from God to *personal* self-examination, and preparation for death.

^q Rom. ii. 4.

^r Heb. iv. 1.

DCXXXIV.

THE FRUIT OF IMPENITENCE AND UNBELIEF.

Ps. lxxviii. 32, 33. *For all this, they sinned still, and believed not for his wondrous works. Therefore their days did he consume in vanity, and their years in trouble.*

IT is a saying of Solomon's, that "he who soweth iniquity, shall reap vanity^a:" and the truth of this is remarkably illustrated throughout all the history of God's ancient people. The Jews were, beyond all comparison, the most favoured people upon earth: and if they had made a due improvement of their mercies, they would have been as much exalted above others in happiness, as they were in their outward privileges. But neither mercies nor judgments could prevail upon them to yield themselves unfeignedly to God. The mercies they received were so signal, that one would have supposed it impossible for them to forget the Donor. Their judgments, too, on some occasions were so awful, that one would have supposed fear should supply the place of love, and constrain them to turn to God with their whole hearts. In the preceding part of this psalm, these dealings of God with them are especially referred to: yet, in my text we are told, "They sinned still, and believed not for his wondrous works." In consequence of this, they reaped according to what they sowed: for, on account of this incorrigibleness, "God consumed their days in vanity and their years in trouble."

But is that generation passed away? Is there not amongst us the same obstinacy in sin? and do we not feel the same effects of transgression? Yes, verily, *they* are a mirror in which we may see our own image; and the events of their days are still visible in ours. This will appear, whilst I shew,

I. The incorrigible obstinacy of sinners—

God diversifies his dealings with us for our good—

[Our temporal mercies, public, social, personal, have been equal to any that have been vouchsafed to any people under heaven — — — But what shall I say of our *spiritual* mercies? Verily, if a preached Gospel be the greatest of all mercies, *we* have indeed very abundant reason to acknowledge the transcendent goodness of God to us — — — In some instances, too, has God dealt with us, both individually and collectively, in a way of paternal chastisement — — —]

But to an awful extent have we persisted in impenitence and unbelief—

^a Prov. xxii. 8.

[What were the sins in which we indulged years ago? Take us as a collective body; and it must be said, "In those we continue still." The gay, the worldly, the sensual, the profane, all follow their respective courses as much as ever, equally unallured by mercies, and unawed by judgments — — — Nor have all "the wonders" of redeeming love, though so fully and faithfully proclaimed, wrought any change in us. As the Israelites, though so *visibly* under the care of Almighty God, could not be prevailed upon to enter into the design of God's mercies to them, or to yield up themselves to him in a way of holy obedience, so neither are we led to exercise a simple faith on the Lord Jesus Christ, and to "cleave unto him with full purpose of heart" — — — Dependence on him, communion with him, and devotedness to him, are as far from us as ever — — — Our heads possibly may be instructed; but our hearts and lives are unchanged — — —]

And now let me ask, What are,

II. The bitter fruits which they reap from it?

Certainly, if ever a people could be happy, the circumstances in which the Israelites were placed were calculated to make *them* happy. But "their days were consumed in vanity, and their years in trouble," as the just punishment of their sins. And how are *our* lives spent?

What have *we*, but vanity and trouble?

[In the abundance of all things that we enjoy, it is surprising how little there is of real comfort to the possessors. Many possess all that the world can give; yet "in the midst of their sufficiency they are in straits^b." It may be thought that the rich are happier than the poor: but the very reverse of this is true. God has cursed their very blessings^c — — — Yea, the nearest of all connexions which God ordained for the happiness of man is, in a great majority of instances, unattended with the blessedness which the parties hoped for; yea, and too often is made a source of bitterest woe. Truly, "man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upwards^d:" and this poor wilderness world is found to most a vale of tears — — —]

And what is this but the fruit of sin?

[This was not the state of man in Paradise: it came as the fruit of sin: and in proportion as men live without God in the world, is the world and every thing in it embittered to them.

It may be asked, Are the saints exempt from this common lot? Do not they find "vanity and trouble" here below, as well as others? They do; but by no means *in the same degree*.

^b Job xx. 22.

^c Deut. xxviii. 15—20.

^d Job v. 6, 7.

To the saints, blessings are really blessings; and even troubles are blessings in disguise. The man who truly believes in Christ, enjoys, in common mercies, a sense of God's love and favour, to which an unbeliever is an utter stranger: and his trials he receives as paternal chastisements, which are the means ordained for his furtherance in the divine life, and for the eventual increase of his happiness to all eternity. Though therefore, in a certain degree, he finds vanity and vexation of spirit to be stamped on all sublunary good, he has, on the whole, a different portion from that of the ungodly world even *here*: and *hereafter*, I need not say how widely different is his lot. As for the impenitent and unbelieving, possess what they may, they are not happy; and, in the prospect of death and judgment, it is from want of reflection only if they are not completely miserable — — —]

TO APPLY the subject to our hearts—

[Have we not sinned enough already? May not the past time suffice for our neglect of God, and our contempt of his favours? Shall it continue to be said of us, 'They have sinned still; and will not believe in God, notwithstanding all his wondrous works?' Do but look back, and see what has hitherto been the "fruit" of such a life^e. I appeal to all, What have ye found but vanity and trouble, even in your best enjoyments? Verily, they have been but as the "crackling of thorns under a pot," which blazed for a moment, and then vanished in smoke^f. Indeed, Brethren, if the happiness of this world only were concerned, I should recommend to you a life of penitential sorrow, and of entire devotedness to God: for "godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life which now is, as well as of that which is to come^g." But there is a world to come; a world in which we shall reap, in its full extent, the fruit of our present conduct. Oh! where will the impenitent transgressor find pardon then? and where the contemptuous unbelieving sinner flee to hide himself from the wrath of an avenging God? Let there then, Brethren, be an end to your contest with the God of heaven. Cast down the weapons of your rebellion; and, with penitential faith, cast yourselves on the Saviour, who died even for the very chief of sinners. "Humble yourselves truly under the mighty hand of God; and in due season, notwithstanding all your past transgressions, he will lift you up^h." — — —]

^e Rom. vi. 21.

^g 1 Tim. iv. 8.

^f Eccl. vii. 6.

^h Jam. iv. 10.

DCXXXV.

THE EXTENT OF GOD'S MERCY.

Ps. lxxviii. 34—39. *When he slew them, then they sought him; and they returned and inquired early after God: and they remembered that God was their Rock, and the high God their Redeemer. Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues: for their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant. But he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath: for he remembered that they were but flesh, a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again.*

THE psalm before us is altogether historical: yet may it be called one great parable. It is, in fact, so called by the Psalmist himself: and the very words by which he designates this composition are quoted by the Evangelist as fulfilled, when our blessed Lord spake to the people in parables, and in parables exclusively^a. The truth is, that the whole account of the redemption of Israel from Egypt, with their preservation in the wilderness, and their final establishment in the land of Canaan, is typical of man's redemption through Christ, and of the final salvation of all God's chosen people. It is not unlike the parable of the Prodigal Son: and, unless we view it in this light, and read in it the great concerns of our own souls, we have no just conception of its true import. As a record of the most important events in the Jewish history, the writer of it might justly urge the importance of transmitting it with care, and teaching it with diligence, to all succeeding generations^b: but, as a vehicle of spiritual instruction, it is of inestimable value, not to Jews only, but to Gentiles also, and ought to be studied with care by every child of man.

We shall not now enter into a minute illustration of this truth, because it would occupy far more of your attention than could be allotted to one discourse: but a general view of the subject will be

^a Compare ver. 2. with Matt. xiii. 35. ^b ver. 3—6.

brought before us, whilst we notice the conduct of the Israelites towards God, and his forbearance towards them, or, in other words,

I. The extent of their wickedness—

They were continually provoking God to anger—

[They were from the beginning “a rebellious and gain-saying people.” Never would they pay any regard to God, till they were constrained to do so by his chastening rod. In vain were his mercies multiplied unto them: they overlooked them all, and “forgot all the wonders” of his love and mercy^c. Dissatisfied with what he gave them for their subsistence, notwithstanding it was “angels’ food,” they lusted after things which were in no respect necessary for their well-being^d. And when they had provoked God to punish them for their ungrateful murmurings, instead of being reclaimed by his chastisements, “they only sinned yet more against him^e.” When, in consequence of their obstinacy, these chastisements became more severe, and no way of deliverance was found but by their turning unto God, they pretended to return unto him; but it was a mere pretence. They called to remembrance his past interpositions in their favour, and professed to acknowledge him as their Redeemer and their God: but they only “flattered him” with titles, which excited no corresponding sentiments in their hearts, and “lied unto him” with vows, which they never intended to perform. They pretended to lay hold on “his covenant:” but they would “not be steadfast in it, or perform any of the engagements which it entailed upon them.”]

And what is this, but a history of ourselves also?

[In our prosperity, we care not about God; “he is not in all our thoughts”— — — But under some heavy calamity we begin to lay to heart our former transgressions, and to inquire after God. This is common, especially in sickness, and at the expected approach of death^f. Then we can bear to hear of God, and of Christ; yea, we apply to God as our Father, and to Christ as our Redeemer; we acknowledge with apparent gratitude all that they have done for us; and profess a dependence on them for all that we stand in need of— — — Yet in the midst of all these professions there is no true contrition, no real self-abhorrence, no fixed determination to give up ourselves unreservedly to God. We approach our God indeed, but it is “with flattery and lies^g.” We profess much love to him, and much delight in that covenant which he has made with us in Christ Jesus; but “our hearts are not right with him, neither are we steadfast in his covenant.” This appears from our

^c ver. 11.

^d ver. 18—25.

^e ver. 17, 32.

^f Isai. xxvi. 16. and Hcs. v. 15.

^g Hos. xi. 12.

speedy return to vanity, as soon as ever the judgment is removed from us. We are like metal taken out of the furnace, which, however liquefied, soon returns to its original hardness. Our relentings possibly have been renewed either under the ministry of the word, or by some fresh calamity: but, after all, like Pharaoh, we have only verified that humiliating description of the Apostle, "we have turned again with the dog to his vomit, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.]"

These rebellions however against their God only gave occasion for displaying,

II. The extent of his mercy—

Many times did he forgive them—

[Often, through the greatness of their provocations, did he lift up his hand to destroy them in the wilderness; but he forbore to execute upon them the judgments they deserved. "He remembered that they were but flesh, or as a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again;" and, if he should give vent to his indignation against them, they must inevitably, and irremediably perish.]

It is thus also that he hath dealt with us—

["How oft have we provoked him, and grieved him by our transgressions^h!" — — — yet on every fresh occasion he has shewn himself "slow to anger and of great kindness." Let every one think with himself how many seasons there have been, when, in heart at least, if not in act, we have exceeded our usual measure of wickedness, and when he might have cut us off, so to speak, with advantage, and made us signal monuments of his displeasure — — — Yet he has borne with us, and not suffered his whole displeasure to arise. He has, thus far at least, "forgiven us;" and, in answer to the intercessions of our great High Priest, he has spared the barren fig-tree, revoking the order for its removal, and renewing, for its preservation, all the means which have hitherto been used in vain. Of this his mercy we are all living monuments: from time to time he has said concerning us, "How shall I give thee upⁱ?" "Wilt thou not be made clean? when shall it once be^k?" Yes, we must all bear witness for him, that the only reason of our not having been long since "consumed, is, because his compassions fail not.]"

SEE, then,

1. What improvement we should make of afflictive providences—

[What the Jews *professed* to do, we should do *in reality* — — — God sends afflictions for this end — — — and, if they

^h ver. 40.

ⁱ Hos. xi. 7—9.

^k Jer. xiii. 27.

produce this happy effect, we shall have reason to be thankful for them.]

2. What, under all circumstances, should be the chief object of our attention—

[The Jews failed, because “their heart was not right with God.” Let us look to this, that we indulge not hypocrisy in our hearts. If we call God our God, and our Redeemer, let our eyes be to him as our only, and our all-sufficient Help.]

DCXXXVI.

THE EFFICACY OF PRAYER.

Ps. lxxx. 17—19. *Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself. So will not we go back from thee: quicken us, and we will call upon thy name. Turn us again, O Lord God of Hosts; cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.*

THIS psalm appears to have been written about the time when Sennacherib had invaded the land of Judah, and threatened the two remaining tribes of Judah and Benjamin with the same utter destruction as had already been inflicted on the ten tribes of Israel. The writer, whoever he was, addresses Jehovah in nearly the same terms as Hezekiah did on that occasion, even as “the Lord of Hosts that dwelt between the cherubim^a.” And when he says, “Before Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, stir up thy strength, and come and save us;” he merely desires that God would afford them now the same protection as he had formerly afforded to all his people in the wilderness; which protection these three tribes had better opportunities of discovering than others; because, whilst three tribes preceded the ark, and three marched on either side, these three brought up the rear, and consequently were in a better situation for noticing the various interpositions of Jehovah in their behalf. The disconsolate state of the country at that time is set forth by the Psalmist under the figure of a vine, which had been planted there by Jehovah himself, and had flourished so as to fill the whole land; but now it was exposed to all the rage of the

^a ver. 1. with Isai. xxxvii. 15—17.

enemy, who “wasted and destroyed it;” and it would shortly be entirely rooted out, if God did not speedily interpose for its protection^b. By “the man of God’s right hand, and the Son of Man whom God had made strong for himself,” I suppose the Psalmist intended to specify king Hezekiah, whom he entreated God to make his instrument for effecting the desired deliverance: and in the latter verses of my text he promises, in behalf of the nation at large, that the mercy shall not be lost upon them, but shall be requited by them in the way which God will approve, even by greater steadfastness in their future adherence to him, and a more entire obedience to his commands.

In this view, I conceive, the psalm may properly be applied either to the Church, or to any individual Believer in a season of deep distress: and “the Son of Man, whom Jehovah has made strong for himself,” may be understood as designating the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the King of Israel, and whom in that capacity Hezekiah especially prefigured.

Let the afflicted Believer then see in this passage,
I. How to approach God in a season of trouble—

We are especially invited to “go to God in a time of trouble.” But in what way shall we approach him?

The Lord Jesus Christ is the appointed Head of God’s Church and people—

[Even whilst he was yet on earth, “all power in heaven and on earth was given to him^c,” and, on his ascension to heaven, he was constituted “Head over all things to the Church^d,” and had all fulness committed to him^e, “that he might fill all things^f,” and be the one source of light and life to the spiritual world, as the sun in the firmament is to this material globe on which we live. To this the Psalmist bears testimony, when he says, “Thou spakest in vision to thy Holy One, and saidst, *I have laid help upon One that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people. I have found David my servant: with my holy oil have I anointed him: with whom my hand shall be established: mine arm also shall strengthen him^g.*” In this passage there is no doubt but that the Lord Jesus Christ is spoken of precisely in the view in

^b ver. 8—16.

^c Matt. xxvii. 18.

^d Eph. i. 22.

^e Col. i. 19.

^f Eph. iv. 10.

^g Ps. lxxxix. 19—21.

which I suppose him to be spoken of in the psalm before us. He is that David whom God has anointed to rule over his Church and people, and through whom he will shew himself at all times mighty to save.]

Through Him, then, we must seek for God's effectual help—

[*Through* him must we look for the acceptance of our prayers; and *from* him must we expect those communications which God has promised to his believing people. "God has made him strong," not for *us* only, but "for *himself*" also; seeing that in this mode of dispensing his blessings he is particularly glorified. This is the account given us by an inspired Apostle: "Him hath God highly exalted, and given him a name above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, *to the glory of God the Father*^h." And to the same effect our Lord himself also says, " whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will *I* do, *that the Father may be glorified in the Son*ⁱ." Let not any one, then, hesitate to look thus to Christ, from an apprehension that, in so honouring the Son, he should dishonour the Father: for God would have "all men to honour the Son even as they honour the Father:" and he declares, that "he who honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father who hath sent him^k." Be it remembered, then, that Jesus is "the way, the truth, and the life; and that no man cometh unto the Father, but by him^l."]

From the passage before us we may further learn,

II. What we should seek for at His hands—

Doubtless we are permitted to ask for deliverance from trouble. But there are other things which we are far more concerned to ask, even things for the production of which affliction itself is sent us. We should seek,

1. The communications of God's grace—

[These are of infinitely more importance than any temporal deliverance. With these, every affliction is light: without them, no enjoyment whatever is of any real value. Whatever be our state as it respects ease or trouble, we are dead, and need to be "quickened;" we are rebellious, and need to be "turned." The first thing, then, that we should seek, should be quickening and converting grace. Every creature in the

^h Phil. ii. 9—11.

^k John v. 23.

ⁱ John xiv. 13.

^l John xiv. 6.

universe stands in need of these; and on the attainment of it depends our everlasting welfare. Let every one, then, pray, "Quicken me, O Lord!" Oh! turn me, for thy mercy's sake! "Turn thou me, and I shall be turned."]

2. The manifestations of his favour—

[We should never rest without an evidence in our own souls that we are the Lord's. While our interest in his favour is doubtful, what happiness can we enjoy? There must always be a secret fear and misgiving, that ere long we may become monuments of his righteous indignation. We should therefore entreat of God to "lift up the light of his countenance upon us," and to give us a spirit of adoption, testifying that we are his. It is not the sun of outward prosperity that we are to desire, but that inward light, by which we can discern our adoption into his family, and our title to his glory. This will make every "yoke easy, and every burthen light."]

But the text itself leads us to consider,

III. The fruit and consequence of accepted prayer—

These blessings once obtained, we shall assuredly, possess,

1. Stability in God's ways—

[Thousands there are who "run well only for a season," and who, by turning back from God, make "their latter end worse than their beginning." But real conversion, especially when it issues in a peaceful walk with God, produces a decision of character which nothing can shake. I mean not to say that any man has strength of his own, whereby he can stand: even St. Paul himself needed incessant care and watchfulness, lest, "after having preached to others, he himself should become a cast-away." But a sense of God's love in the soul confirms our confidence in him; and enables us, in dependence on his grace, to hurl defiance at all the enemies of our salvation, and to rest assured that "none shall ever prevail to separate us from his love."]

2. The everlasting enjoyment of his favour—

[Thrice is this repeated, and each time with increasing earnestness: "Turn us again, O God, and we shall be saved: turn again, O God of Hosts, and we shall be saved: turn us again, O Lord God of Hosts, and we shall be saved^m." If we commit ourselves truly to the Lord Jesus Christ, "none shall ever pluck us out of his hands;" but that promise shall be fully verified, "Israel shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation; ye shall not be ashamed or confounded world without endⁿ."]

^m ver. iii. 7, 19.

ⁿ Isai. xlv. 17.

Hence we may SEE,

1. How little reason there is for any man to despond—

[Who can be in a more desperate state than that depicted in the psalm before us? Yet for them was relief solicited and obtained. And is there not the same help for us? Is not the Saviour as mighty as ever? Is his hand shortened at all, that it cannot save? or his ear heavy, that it cannot hear? Let, then, the same means be used, and the same result may assuredly be expected. I will suppose that the enemy has “overflowed even to the neck,” and is even now exulting in his triumphs. Spread but your case before the Lord, as Hezekiah did, and you may adopt the language which was put into his mouth; “The virgin, the daughter of Israel, hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee.” Sooner shall heaven and earth pass away, than one praying and believing soul be left to perish.]

2. How little ground there is for any one to glory—

[I will suppose that any one of you is now flourishing like the vine, of which the Psalmist speaks, in all its glory. Whence came you? Know that you were once in Egypt, and were brought out thence to the place in which you stand. And who has kept you from being trodden down and devoured by the beasts of the field? It is God alone who has kept you, even to the present hour. It is He who gave you his converting grace; He who infused peace into your soul by the light of his reconciled countenance. And when you shall arrive at the realms of glory, it is to Him that you must ascribe your salvation, from first to last. If any man be disposed to glory, I would ask, “Who made thee to differ? And what hast thou, which thou hast not received?” Whilst you are building on the true foundation here, you must say continually, “By the grace of God, I am what I am^o” and when “the headstone shall be brought forth with shoutings,” you must spend eternity in crying, “Grace, grace unto it^q!”]

^o Isai. xxxvii. 22.

^p 1 Cor. xv. 10.

^q Zech. iv. 7.

DCXXXVII.

PRAYER EFFECTUAL, TO ANY EXTENT.

Ps. lxxxi. 10. *I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.*

ACCESS to God, and a certainty of acceptance with him, have been amongst the most distinguished privileges of the Lord's people in all ages. To his

ancient people the Jews, God said, "What nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for?" To us, under the Christian dispensation, it is promised, that "wherever two or three are gathered together in the name of Jesus, there will that blessed Saviour be in the midst of them." None shall "draw nigh to him in prayer, but he will also draw nigh to them," to answer their prayers. In the psalm before us, God most affectionately encourages his people to come to him, and to enlarge their requests to the utmost extent of their necessities: "Hear, O my people! and I will testify unto thee, O Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto me." "I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt; open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it."

Here, Brethren, let me call your attention to,

I. The invitation given us—

How comprehensive the words in which it is contained!

[Here is no limit to our petitions. On the contrary, we are encouraged to extend them to every thing that our souls can desire. Nor is there any limit assigned, beyond which we are not to expect an answer. Whatever we want for body or for soul, for time or for eternity, it shall all be given us, if only we will "approach unto God," and "make our requests known unto him."]

And how marvellous the invitation, as sent by God to sinful man!

[God can receive nothing from us: "our goodness can never extend to him." He is altogether independent of us: and if the whole human race were annihilated this very moment, God would suffer no loss. Neither his honour nor his happiness were in the least diminished, when the fallen angels were cast out of heaven into the bottomless abyss of hell: nor if we were all plunged into the same abyss of misery, would God be in the least affected by it. Yet, behold, *He* deigns to send us the gracious invitation which we have just heard, and permits even the vilest amongst us to regard it as addressed personally to himself. To every soul amongst us he says, "Open *thy* mouth wide, and I will fill it."]

Listen then with wonder to,

II. The consideration with which it is enforced—

Surprising encouragement! Mark it,

1. As referring to God's ancient people—

[God had brought them out of Egypt with a mighty hand and a stretched-out arm. What *an evidence* was this of *his power!* and what a *pledge* was this of *his willingness* to do for them all that their necessities might require! Behold the sea opening before them, to give a dry path to them, and to overwhelm in one common ruin every one of their pursuers! Behold the bread given them for forty years by a daily miraculous supply from heaven, and the water from the rock following them in all their way! See them at last established in the Promised Land! Could they ask more than had already been done for them? And if these things had been done notwithstanding all their rebellions, what should they not obtain if they would implore it with all humility from God?]

2. As comprehending that more wonderful redemption vouchsafed to *us*—

[If the typical redemption from Egypt afforded such encouragement to prayer, what must we think of that redemption which it shadowed forth, even the redemption of our souls from death and hell, by the precious blood of God's only dear Son? Hear Jehovah saying, 'I am the Lord thy God, who became a man for thee; who died upon the cross for thee; who bore thy sins in my own body on the tree, that thou mightest be freed from the condemnation due to them, and mightest inherit a throne of glory!' What a *claim* is this to *our gratitude!* what an *incentive to the utmost possible enlargement of our petitions!* and what an *encouragement to our most unshaken affiance!* Take the invitation by itself, and it expresses all that we can wish: but take it in connexion with this consideration with which it is enforced, and methinks there will not be one amongst us that will not most cordially accept it, and most thankfully avail himself of the liberty, the inestimable liberty, thus accorded to him.]

But, seeing that this invitation has been so often sent to us,

1. How amazing is it that any of us can live without prayer!

[Methinks it were almost a libel upon human nature to suppose that there should be any one so stupid and so brutish as to live without prayer; and I ought to make an apology for suggesting even a possibility that such an one may be found in this assembly. Well; forgive me, if in this I have erred: yet I would affectionately put it home to the consciences

of all who are here present, and ask, Have *you*, my Brethren, and *you*, and *you*, really sought after God, and spread your wants before him, and implored mercy at his hands, and wrestled with him, as it were, in prayer, for an out-pouring of his Spirit upon you? Have you done it this week past? Have you done it this very morning? Can you call God to witness that you have thus opened your mouth wide before him, in the hope that he would fill and satisfy you with the abundance of his grace? Is there no one amongst you that stands reproved for his neglect of this duty? Yea, rather, are there not some amongst you who have never poured out their souls before God in prayer during their whole life, or, at all events, only under the pressure of some great calamity, which, when it was past, left them in the same careless and obdurate state as before? Perhaps some of you may have *repeated some form* which you learned in early life, or may have *read some form* out of a book: but this is not prayer, if it be unattended with the real desires of the heart: prayer, is not a mere service of the lip and knee, but the effusion of the soul before God in earnest supplication. I lament to think how many there are utter strangers to such holy wrestlings, such sweet communion with their God. Let me, then, remind such persons what sad regret they excite in the bosom of Jehovah; and what bitter regret they themselves also will one day experience in their own bosoms. God says, "O that my people had hearkened to me, and Israel had walked in my ways!" And will not you also, ere long, adopt a similar language, and say, "O that I had hearkened to the voice of my God, and had walked in the ways to which he called me!" And if God contemplate with such regret the blessings which he would have bestowed^a, with what sad regret will you one day view the blessings you have lost! Be wise in time; and now avail yourselves of the opportunity that is afforded you, "seeking the Lord whilst he *may* be found, and calling upon him whilst he is near."

2. How lamentable is it that any one should yield to discouragement in prayer!

[What could God *say* to you, more than he *has said*; or *do for* you, more than he *has done*? St. Paul says, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with Him also freely give us all things?" Only reflect on what he has done, and how impossible it was any fallen creature should *dare* to ask *such* things at God's hands, and you need not fear to enlarge your petitions, to the utmost extent of language to express, or of imagination to conceive. You are not straitened in him; be not straitened in yourselves^b. Only spread your wants before him freely, and you shall find

^a ver. 13—16.

^b 2 Cor. vi. 12.

that "He is able to do for you exceeding abundantly above all that you can ask or even think^c." Go to him, then, and "pray to him with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit;" yea, "pray without ceasing," and "give him no rest" till he has answered your requests. But be not hasty to imagine that he will not hear; because he may already have heard and answered in the way most conducive to your good, whilst you are doubting whether he will so much as listen to your petitions. Of course you cannot expect to receive, unless you ask according to his will^d; but, with that reserve only, I assure you, that "ye may ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you^e." Only "ask in faith," and "according to your faith it shall be done unto you."]]

^c Eph. iii. 20.

^d 1 John v. 14.

^e John xv. 7.

DCXXXVIII.

GOD GIVING UP OBSTINATE TRANSGRESSORS.

Ps. lxxxix. 11, 12. *My people would not hearken to my voice, and Israel would none of me: so I gave them up.*

THE history of the Jews is not a mere record of times and persons far distant from us, but a display of the Divine procedure towards others, as a pledge of a similar procedure towards us. The Jews were intended as examples to the Church of God in all ages: their prosperity whilst serving God, and their adversity when they had departed from him, were designed to shew us what blessings we may expect at God's hands, if we serve him acceptably; and what judgments, if we rebel against him^a. In this view it will be profitable to consider the words before us; and,

I. The perverseness complained of—

Nothing could exceed the kindness of God towards his people of old—

[How tender and affectionate is his address to them^b! — — — He entreats them not to look to any strange god, since he alone has an exclusive right to their regard^c — — — He assures them also, that whatsoever they shall ask at his hands, he will do it for them^d — — —

And is it not precisely in the same way that he addresses us?

^a See 1 Cor. x. 1—11. and Heb. iii. 16—19. and iv. 1.

^b ver. 8.

^c ver. 9, 10.

^d ver. 10. with Deut. iv. 7.

He invites us to look to him^e, and to come unto him^f, and to ask of him whatsoever we will, with an assurance that we shall not be disappointed of our hope^g. There is no limitation or exception, provided only the things we desire be agreeable to his holy will. If we plead with him in earnest, there is no sin that shall not be forgiven^h, no corruption that shall not be mortifiedⁱ, no want that shall not be supplied^k. He engages, that, to whatever temptation we may be exposed, his grace shall be sufficient for us^l.]

But their obstinacy was incorrigible—

[The Jews, with but few exceptions, “would not hearken to his voice.” His precepts, his promises, his threatenings, were alike disregarded by them. “They would none of him;” but said to his messengers whom he sent to reclaim them, “Make the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us” — — —

And is it not thus with us? Is not his authority trampled on by us? and are not both his mercies and judgments almost universally despised? We will have other objects of our affections in preference to him — — — We will not open our mouths in prayer, though we know that nothing is to be obtained without it — — — The language of our hearts and actions is, “We will not have this man to reign over us^m” — — — Notwithstanding all that he has done to “redeem” us from death and hell, we will not take upon ourselves his light and easy yoke.]

While we thus imitate the perverseness of the Jews, let us tremble for fear of,

II. The judgments inflicted on account of it—

Consider,

1. What a loss they sustained—

[He would have preserved them in Canaan, and loaded them with all imaginable blessings, even as he had done in former timesⁿ — — —

But this was a very faint shadow of what he would do for us. What victory would he have given us over all our spiritual enemies! — — — What a fulness of consolation and joy also would he have bestowed upon us, in the communications of his grace, and the manifestations of his love! Surely his Spirit, as “a Spirit of adoption,” should have “witnessed with our spirits that we were his,” and should have “sealed us unto the day of redemption” — — —]

2. What misery they incurred—

^e Isai. xlv. 22. and lv. 1—3.

^f Matt. xi. 28.

^g John xiv. 13, 14. and xv. 7.

^h Isai. i. 18.

ⁱ Mic. vii. 19. ^k Phil. iv. 19.

^l 2 Cor. xii. 8, 9.

^m Luke xix. 14.

ⁿ Deut. xxxii. 29.

[God gave them up to idolatry, and to their own hearts' lusts; and left them to "walk in their own counsels"^o — — —

And this is the curse which he denounces against us also. "His spirit will not always strive with us." If he see that we are bent upon our evil ways, he will abandon us to our own delusions^p, and will say, "He is joined to idols, let him alone"^q — — — A greater curse than this God cannot inflict, because our remaining days will be occupied only in augmenting our guilt and aggravating our condemnation^r — — — Were the judgment only to deliver our bodies to *Satan* now, *that* might lead to our final *salvation*: but to give us over to the uncontrolled influence of *self*, is a certain prelude to our everlasting *damnation*. It is, in fact, the very beginning of hell, where it will be said to the unhappy souls, "He that is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is unjust, let him be unjust still^s."] Hence it APPEARS,

1. Whose will be the fault, if any be lost—

[None can lay it to the charge of God that he is unwilling to save them. He has sworn with an oath that he willeth not the death of any sinner^t. And in the psalm before us he takes up a lamentation over those who obstinately compel him to give them up^u. Thus did our blessed Lord over the murderous Jerusalem^x: and thus does he over all impenitent transgressors; "Ye will not come unto me that ye may have life^y." "Often would I have gathered you, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings; but ye would not^z." And what a bitter source of self-condemnation will this be to us, that God would have saved us, but we would not be saved by him! The language which God *now* uses over us, we shall *then* use in reference to ourselves: "O that I had hearkened to his voice! O that I had walked in his ways!" How should I have been at this instant triumphing over my cruel adversary, and feasting on all the richest fruits of paradise, instead of dwelling with everlasting burnings, without one drop of water to cool my tongue! Surely this reflection will be the bitterest ingredient in that bitter cup, which they who perish will be drinking of to all eternity.]

2. Whose will be the glory, if any be saved—

[We never come to Christ, till the Father, by the mighty working of his power, draws us to him. Such is the pride of the human heart, that no man will submit to be saved by grace alone, till God has made him "willing in the day of his power."

^o See Rom. i. 24, 26, 28. "So I gave them up."

^p 2 Thess. ii. 10—12.

^q Hos. iv. 17.

^r Rom. ii. 5.

^s Rev. xxii. 11.

^t Ezek. xxxiii. 11. 1 Tim. ii. 4.

^u ver. 13.

^x Luke xix. 40, 41.

^y John v. 40.

^z Matt. xxiii. 37.

If therefore we have been brought to hearken to his voice, let us remember Who it is that has unstopped our ears.

If it be said, We prayed for these blessings; and therefore at least may glory that the blessings do not come to us unsolicited; we would ask, Who inclined or enabled us to pray? We should never have been inclined to pray, if God had not given us a spirit of grace and of supplication; "nor should we have known what to pray for as we ought, if He by his Spirit had not helped our infirmities." If still it be said, "Yet we prayed;" Be it so: but how long were you before you prayed at all? And what have been your prayers since ever you began to pray? Are you not amazed when you review your prayers, and see how cold, and dead, and formal they have been? What if a beggar had asked of you in the way that you have but too often asked of God? Would you have granted his request? or, if you had granted his request, and not only relieved his present necessities, but conferred upon him one half of your fortune, would you not be surprised, if he, instead of admiring your unequalled generosity, were taking credit to himself for asking relief from you? Know then, that if you are partaking of God's mercy, you are no other than "beggars, who have been taken from the dunghill, and set among the princes." Know, that ye are altogether debtors to the grace of God, and must ascribe to him "the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever."]

DCXXXIX.

DIVINE ORDINANCES LOVELY.

Ps. lxxxiv. 1—4. *How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O Lord of Hosts, my King and my God. Blessed are they that dwell in thine house: they will be still praising thee.*

TRULY it is sweet to read of the experience of the saints, and to be able to appeal to it in vindication of our own experience. I wonder not that the world should cry out against the people of the Lord as enthusiastic and absurd; for they cannot by any means conceive how a person should lose all relish for carnal delights, and find all his happiness in employments wherein they see nothing but restraint and melancholy. But, indeed, there is a delight in communion with a reconciled God, an

ineffable “joy, with which the stranger intermeddleth not.” This is well expressed in the passage before us; from whence I shall take occasion to shew,

I. The light in which we should view divine ordinances—

Certainly the expressions here used in reference to them are exceeding strong. To a mind not conversant with the subject, they would appear rather like the flights of a poetical imagination than as the dictates of sober judgment. But they are not a whit too strong, if viewed in reference to the object respecting which they treat. Both body and soul may well unite in the feelings here expressed, feelings of intense desire, such as envies the very birds the privilege they enjoy of building their nests around the sacred edifice where God’s presence is enjoyed. Truly the tabernacles of the Most High will appear amiable, if we consider that in them,

1. God’s presence is vouchsafed—

[Formerly God dwelt in his sanctuary by the Shechinah, a bright cloud, the symbol of his presence, which was in itself visible to the eye of sense, though it was seen only by the High Priest, and *that* only on one day in the year. *Now*, his presence is visible only to the eye of faith (for there is an eye that “seeth Him that is invisible^a”), and by him who possesses a spiritual discernment, even though he be the least and meanest of God’s children, the divine presence is both seen and felt. What else is the meaning of those words, “If a man love me, my Father will love him; and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him?” Yes, verily, God will manifest himself to his believing people as he does not unto the world^b:” he will, in an especial manner, “draw nigh to those who draw nigh to him: “Wherever two or three are met together in his name, he will be in the midst of them;” and to every weeping suppliant he will say, “Behold me, behold me^c!” “Here I am^d.”]

2. His blessings are dispensed—

[In the days of our blessed Lord, we are informed, that multitudes, labouring under every kind of malady, thronged about him; and that “virtue went forth from him to heal them all^e.” Somewhat similar to this may yet be seen under the ministration of the Gospel. Multitudes, oppressed with

^a Heb. xi. 27.

^b John xiv. 21—23.

^c Isai. lxxv. 1.

^d Isai. lviii. 9.

^e Luke vi. 19.

every species of mental trouble, approach the Majesty of heaven, to pour out before him their supplications, and to receive from him a supply for their diversified necessities. The weary and heavy-laden sinner sues for pardon and peace: the soul, harassed with temptations, implores strength whereby to cope with its great Adversary, and to fulfil the will of God: in a word, whatever be men's trials, thither they bring them all; and there they look for aid; and there, through the ministry of the Word, they actually "find mercy and grace to help them in the time of need." To every distinct case God mercifully suits his aid; and the succour afforded by him proves sufficient for them all: so that, as thousands can testify, when they have come hungering and thirsting for the blessings of salvation, they have not been sent empty away, but have been filled and satisfied with the plenteousness of God's house, and had all their sorrows turned into joy.]

3. His name is glorified—

[Every one, entering the house of God in a becoming spirit, feels a consciousness, that he is approaching a Father and a Friend; yea, a Friend who is infinitely more willing to give than the most oppressed suppliants can be to ask, and "willing to give exceedingly above all that they can either ask or think." Conceive of millions assembled at the very same instant of time, in every quarter of the globe, thus honouring their God as omnipresent to hear their prayers, and omnipotent to supply their wants. Who must not love those ordinances where God is so exalted? Again, amidst all the millions that have been relieved, there is but one sentiment of gratitude to God as their Almighty and all-gracious Benefactor. Verily, in this respect the tabernacles of the Most High on earth resemble his house above, where all the hosts, whether of saints or angels, join in one harmonious song of praise to their creating and redeeming God. Say, are not "God's tabernacles amiable" in such a view as this? and can any one long for them with too intense desire, or enter them with too sublime delight?]

But that this may be more manifest, let us consider,

II. The blessedness of those who estimate them aright—

As for those who only occasionally *visit* the house of God, merely for form sake or to perform a duty, it cannot be expected that they should derive much benefit to their souls. But those who, in the habit of their minds, "*dwell*," as it were, "in God's courts," will find their souls exceedingly elated and comforted. They will acquire, yea, and speedily too

attain, a disposition of mind that is little understood by the world at large, a spirit of praise and thanksgiving, not unlike to that which animates the hosts above.

1. Their occasions for praise will incessantly be renewed—

[Not a prayer they offer shall ever go forth in vain. Their access to God will become more intimate, their confidence in him more entire, their communion with him more sweet, and their communications from him more abundant. As every day brings with it fresh temporal benefits, so will their stock of spiritual blessings be daily multiplied, so that it shall appear to them as if a new series of mercies were every day begun; a series, for the acknowledgment of which an eternity of ages would scarcely suffice.]

2. In the exercise of praise they will abound more and more—

[I say not that they will cease to pray; for their need of prayer will never cease, till they arrive in heaven itself. But their devotions will more assume the character of praise: their view of the divine perfections will be greatly enlarged; and their sense of God's mercies be deepened, insomuch that they will see mercy in every thing, and be disposed "in every thing to give thanks." Their very trials and afflictions will be regarded as tokens of God's love, and as incentives to praise Him "who giveth songs in the night." If their tribulations be great, they will glory in them, as contributing both to their present^f and eternal welfare^g. Behold the Apostles just dismissed from scourging and imprisonment! they go forth "rejoicing that they are counted worthy to suffer shame for Christ's sake." Behold Paul and Silas also with their feet made fast in the stocks, whilst their backs are yet bleeding by the stripes just recently inflicted on them! Do they mourn and weep? No, "they sing praises unto God at midnight." Now, all this was the fruit of communion with God: and in proportion as we also live nigh to God in prayer, we shall surely find, whether in life or death, little else than occasions of praise. In whatever state we be, we shall be uttering thanksgivings to God; yea, come what may, we shall "be still praising him."]

SEE, then, I pray you,

1. The happiness of the saints—

[I may appeal to you, whether the worldling has any source of joy that can be compared with this? No, verily; the first monarch upon earth that is ignorant of God, feedeth

^f Rom. viii. 28.

^g 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18.

only upon husks: whereas the true saint, though poor as Lazarus himself, eateth of "angels' food" — — —]

2. The blessedness of heaven—

[If such be God's courts below, what must heaven itself be? Well may we long to be there. Well may we "desire to depart and be with Christ," where we shall "behold him face to face." I need not say, how blessed are that choir who day and night incessantly sing praises to God and to the Lamb. But may we so anticipate that employment, that we may be prepared to join in it to all eternity! Amen, and Amen.]

DCXL.

GOD'S ORDINANCES PRECIOUS.

Ps. lxxxiv. 10. *I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.*

IN matters of doubtful disputation, it is of great advantage to have some established ground, to which reference may be made; and some adjudged case, on which arguments may be founded, without any farther appeal. In my text, the point at issue is, Which is preferable, the service of God, or the service of the world? On this subject there is a great diversity of opinion; some accounting the world the only true source of happiness, whilst others conceive that there is no happiness but in God. But we have in the very words before the text an adjudged case, which may well determine the point for ever. The Psalmist expressly declares, that "a day in God's courts is better than a thousand" elsewhere. If a doubt arise whether he was competent to decide the matter, I answer, that, as a King, he knew all that attached to royalty and to the splendour of earthly courts; and, as a Saint, he knew what was to be found in the exercises of piety and devotion: and, consequently, he was a proper person to hold the scales, and to declare on which side true happiness preponderated. Besides, his particular situation at this time qualified him in a more than ordinary way to form a just judgment: for he was driven (it is supposed) by Absalom both from his throne and from the house of God: and consequently he could declare, from his own experience, which of the two losses was the

heavier, and which was the greater subject of regret. Under these circumstances we read not one word of complaint respecting the loss of his kingdom: his mind was wholly occupied about the ordinances of God, of which he was deprived. "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God^a." He envies the very birds the facility which they enjoyed of approaching the altars of the Lord, and more especially the priests who had constant opportunities of officiating there; as also the people, who could come, though with great difficulty, from the extremest parts of the land to worship there at the appointed feasts^b. He then begs of God to restore him to the enjoyment of these lost privileges^c; and declares, that, in his judgment, "one day spent in his courts was better than a thousand" elsewhere; and that he would rather be a door-keeper in the House of God, than to dwell amidst the richest enjoyments that the tents of wickedness could afford him.

The case being so clearly determined by him, I will endeavour to point out,

I. The grounds of his judgment—

He preferred the lowest office imaginable in the House of the Lord, before the highest that was merely secular; for he deemed it,

1. More honourable—

[In earthly palaces, dwell "men of like passions with ourselves:" but in Mount Zion God himself dwells: there he holds his court: there he sits upon his throne: thither all his servants come to behold his glory, to worship at his footstool, and to receive the tokens of his gracious favour. There, though invisible, are assembled all the hosts of heaven; so that the humble worshipper, when coming thither, is justly said to have "come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born that are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than the blood of Abel^d."

^a ver. 1, 2. ^b ver. 3—7. ^c ver. 8, 9. ^d Heb. xii. 22—24.

Now, conceive of a poor man admitted only to "the threshold" of this holy place^e, and compare his state with that of the most distinguished favourite of an earthly monarch; and say, whether the honour conferred on him be not infinitely higher than any which earthly courtiers can possess? In truth, the matter admits not of comparison. Between a king on his throne and a beggar on the dunghill there is no disparity at all, when compared with that between a creature and his Creator; so that in this respect the Psalmist had just ground for his preference: for in proportion as "God humbles himself, when he beholds the things which are on earth," is that man exalted, who becomes the object of his condescension and grace.]

2. More delightful—

[We will concede to the delights of sense all that the most sanguine mind can annex to them: but still they are carnal and temporary, and cloying and unsatisfying; and the man who possesses the greatest portion of them all, must acknowledge them to be justly designated, "Vanity, and vexation of spirit." But very different is the character of those pleasures which the sinner partakes of in the presence of his God. Behold the publican standing, as it were, on the very threshold of God's house, as unworthy to enter in: behold him smiting his breast, and, with floods of tears, crying, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" To the eye of sense he appears a miserable object, that decides at once the point at issue in favour of the world: but to the eye of faith he is an object, whose state may well be envied by the greatest and happiest of carnal men: for He, who is "the true and faithful Witness," has said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit: blessed are they that mourn." On the mind of such a penitent the light of truth beams with increasing splendour: the peace of God flows down into his soul: a hope full of immortality springs up within him: and the joy of the Holy Ghost elevates his mind to heaven, and gives him a foretaste of angelic bliss. Follow this same person through all the services of the sanctuary: behold him pouring out his soul in prayer to God: hear him singing the praises of redeeming love: mark the emotions of his soul when God's word is preached, and the blessings of redemption, as purchased by Christ and secured to him by an everlasting covenant, are unfolded to his view. What are any carnal delights in comparison of those which fill his soul? Verily, they are not worth a thought: they are only as the husks of swine, whilst he is feasting on "angels' food."]

3. More profitable—

[Temporal advancement a man may gain by attending on earthly courts: but how many miss their aim! and, after all,

^e See the marginal translation.

what does the most successful gain? what can he possess, more than food and raiment? Let the most favoured courtier in the universe say, whether that which he has so assiduously followed be not a delusive shadow, an unsubstantial vanity? But the humble worshipper is in no danger of disappointment; and every particle of what he gains is "durable riches." What can be put in competition with "a new heart," "a right spirit," "a divine nature," a transformation of soul into the very image of God, a meetness for heaven, and a title to an everlasting inheritance? Yet these are the certain portion of those who wait on God in his appointed ordinances: not one can fail, if only he seek these things in the way that God has ordained, namely, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and by an entire surrender of the soul to him. Take notice, I speak not here of those who may be supposed to occupy the highest seats in the Lord's house, as prophets and Apostles: I speak of "the door-keeper, the man upon the threshold," whose conscious unworthiness suffers him "not so much as to lift up his eyes" to his Redeemer's throne: it is of him I say, that he has a better portion than the whole world can bestow; and that "happy is the man that is in such a case; yea, happy is the man who has the Lord for his God."]

Having given what I conceive to be ample grounds for David's judgment, I now come to mark,

II. The wisdom of his decision—

Certainly the whole world of the ungodly are at issue with him on this point. They have no taste for spiritual exercises or spiritual enjoyments. They observe, indeed, the outward forms of religion, for the sake of setting an example to others; but of felicity to be enjoyed in the worship of God they have no idea. If they see persons much interested about the worship of God, they are ready to account them superstitious, and scrupulous, and "righteous over-much;" and all the delight which they perceive to be derived from that source they impute to vanity or enthusiasm. But, however the multitude may prefer the pleasures of sense, we have no hesitation in saying that David's decision was wise,

1. On his side are ranged all the Inspired Men from the foundation of the world—

[There is not a shadow of difference among them in relation to this matter. One common testimony pervades the whole Scriptures. The things of time and sense are invariably

represented as of no value, in comparison of the things which are invisible and eternal; and the possession of the whole world as of no account in exchange for the soul. Now, when there are so many witnesses, all unconnected with each other, and living at times and places so distant from each other, and all inspired by an unerring God, must we not conclude that their testimony is true, and that David, in according with them, was true also? The whole Inspired Volume must be set aside as an imposture and a delusion, if David's preference was not such as wisdom dictated, and God approved.]

2. On his side are even the ungodly, in their hours of more serious reflection—

[Giddy as the world are, and ready to pour contempt on all serious religion, there is not one who does not sometimes say in his heart, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." The consciences of men will sometimes speak; and they will acknowledge that they have never found that satisfaction in earthly things which they had once hoped to find: and that religion alone can bring solid peace into the soul. And here I will venture to appeal to every individual, whether on some particular occasions, perhaps on the death of a friend or in a time of sickness, or after some faithful discourse, he have not felt the vanity of this present world, and the need of securing a portion beyond the grave? and whether, on such occasions, he have not envied the state of those, whom, in his more thoughtless seasons, he has ridiculed? Yes, Herod revered John, because he knew him to be a just and holy man: and Felix trembled, because he could not controvert the statements of Paul: and scarcely is there an ungodly man to be found, who has not, on some occasion or other, justified in his mind, if not in his words, the sentiment avowed by David in our text.]

3. On his side is every man, the very instant he enters into the eternal world—

[Think you that there is a man in heaven that is not like-minded with David? or, that there is one in hell who would not assent to it as a truth which he could no longer doubt? *Here*, men are blinded by their love of earthly things; but in the eternal world they view things as they really are: nor is there one to be found either in heaven or in hell that would not prefer the state of Lazarus with all his privations to that of the Rich Man with all his indulgences. Whence was it that the Rich Man was so anxious to send a messenger to his five surviving brethren? was it not to undeceive them, and to make known to them the proper mode of estimating the things belonging to their peace? So, if it were permitted, would they who are daily and hourly going into the eternal world: gladly

would they send to warn their surviving relatives ; but that cannot be : and if we will not believe Moses and the prophets, we shall learn the truth when it is too late to avail ourselves of it. But all this may serve at least to shew us that the decision of David was truly wise.]

LEARN, then, from hence,

1. How to form a right estimate of your state—

[You must not judge of yourselves by your *actions* only, but by *the tendencies and habits of your minds*. What is *your taste*? is it for communion with God in holy exercises? or is it for the vanities of this present world? God himself teaches us to judge of ourselves by this standard: “They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; and they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit^f.” If your taste accord with that of David, it is well; you have so far an evidence that you are the Lord’s: but if it be the reverse of his, deceive not yourselves; “ye are yet in your sins,” children of the wicked one, and heirs of wrath.]

2. How to make your profiting to appear—

[Cultivate this high and heavenly disposition. Let the things of this world sink in your estimation—sink, I had almost said, into absolute insignificance; and let communion with God be the delight of your soul. Let it be a small matter to you whether you have more or less of the honour that cometh of man; and seek the honour that cometh of God only: and “let your conversation be more and more in heaven, from whence you look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ,” with whom you hope ere long to participate an eternity of bliss.]

^f Rom. viii. 5.

DCXLI.

PROMISES TO THE UPRIGHT.

Ps. lxxxiv. 11. *The Lord God is a sun and a shield: the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will be withhold from them that walk uprightly.*

THE choice which every true Christian makes, affords matter of astonishment to the ungodly world. He prefers a life of godliness with all the odium attached to it, before all the pleasures and honours which he could possibly enjoy in the ways of sin. They, who look no further than to the concerns of time and sense, are amazed that so many sacrifices should be made without any visible recompence. Doubtless the choice of Moses must have been

deemed marvellously absurd in the palace of Pharaoh^a; as that also, which David deliberately made, must have been among his ungodly courtiers. But the reason assigned for it was sufficient to justify him in the eyes of every rational being^b.

His words lead us to shew,

I. The character of true Christians as here described—

“They walk uprightly” both towards God and man. Integrity in our dealings with *man* is an essential part of true uprightness, yet it is far from being the whole of what is comprehended in that term. Many act honestly from a mere sense of honour, while they pay no regard at all to their duties towards God. But sincere Christians act in a very different manner, they have respect to *God* in every thing, that they may approve themselves to *him*.

They search out their duty diligently—

[A child of God will not conclude hastily that he knows his duty. He is aware of the deceitfulness of sin, and the wickedness of his own heart. He knows that, if he blindly follow the dictates of an unenlightened conscience, he may commit murder itself under the idea of doing God service^c. He therefore desires to have his judgment informed. For this end he reads the Holy Scriptures — — — and begs the Spirit of God to guide him into all truth — — — He is glad of instruction and reproof from his fellow-creatures, that he may be preserved from error. And the one desire of his heart is, to be freed from every undue bias — — — and to fulfil in all things the will of God.]

They perform it uniformly—

[Every true Christian labours to do unto others as he would have others do to him. But he does not rest satisfied with this. He strives to maintain the mastery over all his motives and principles of action — — — He endeavours to have his tempers regulated according to the word of God, and the example of his Lord and Saviour — — — He moreover watches unto secret prayer. He lives a life of communion with God — — — and of dependence on God — — — He would not make any exceptions or reserves — — — He longs to be free both from partiality and hypocrisy; and desires rather to descend from a throne to the place of a door-keeper in God's house for the

^a Heb. xi. 24—26. ^b ver. 10, 11. “*I had rather,*” &c. “*For,*” &c.

^c John xvi. 2. Acts xxvi. 9.

maintenance of his integrity, than to rise from the place of a door-keeper to a throne through the smallest violation of his duty^d. He says with David, I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right, and I hate every false way^e. And with him also he prays, “O that my ways may be directed to keep thy statutes^f!”]

What delight God has in such characters we may see, if we consider,

II. The blessedness that shall be accorded to them—

We are here distinctly told what God will be to them—

[There is scarcely any thing noble or useful in the sphere of nature or of art, which is not used to illustrate the goodness of God towards his people. To the upright he will be “*a sun*.”

How welcome is the sun to one who has been groping his dubious way during a long and dreary night^g. His path is now made clear, and he is enabled to avoid the stumbling-blocks which before obstructed his progress. Nor are its beams less refreshing to his body, than its light is useful to his feet. He now shakes off the anxieties and cares with which he was before disquieted. He feels his spirit exhilarated; and prosecutes his journey with ease and pleasure. Thus does God arise on those who have been sincerely occupied in doing his will. He causes light to arise in the darkness^h. Even when they were in darkness, he was a light unto themⁱ; but now he dispels all the clouds, and shines upon them with healing in his beams^k. How sweet the change when the light of God’s countenance is thus lifted up upon them! How plain is now the way of duty, which before was dark and intricate! And how pleasant is it to “run the way of his commandments, now that their feet are set at liberty!”

He will also be to them “*a shield*.” The more upright they are, the more will Satan and the world combine against them. Men will strike at them with the sword of persecution; and Satan will cast at them the fiery darts of temptation. But God will “compass them with his favour as with a shield.” If they be wounded, he will heal them again, and overrule their momentary pain for their greater advantage. As for their head, he will surely protect it in the day of battle. He will perfectly secure them from every fatal blow. Nor shall any weapon that is formed against them be ever suffered finally to prosper^l.

^d ver. 10.

^e Ps. cxix. 128.

^f Ps. cxix. 5.

^g This metaphor must not be taken in its full extent, but only in reference to a traveller.

^h Ps. cxii. 4.

ⁱ Mic. vii. 8.

^k Mal. iv. 2.

^l Isai. liv. 17.

Whilst God himself thus becomes their light and protection, he informs us further,]

What he will do for them—

[He will give them *grace*. Certain it is that he must have given them *grace* before, or else they never would have been able to attain to real uprightness. But, as their conflicts increase, he will give them *more* grace^m. As particular occasions call for it, he will give them *seasonable* grace, even in the very time of needⁿ. And if their temptations should exceed all that ever were experienced by man, he will give them *grace sufficient* for them^o. “My grace is sufficient for thee,” is his word to every soul, however buffeted by Satan, or ready to sink under the violence of his assaults. “They shall receive continually out of Christ’s fulness, even grace for grace.”

He will also give them *glory*. His favours to them shall not terminate with their present state of existence. He will not only make them more than conquerors *here*, but will give them an unfading crown of righteousness and glory in a better world. Whatever felicity the angels enjoy in heaven, that shall his saints also participate. And as our first parents were banished from the tree of life for yielding to the tempter, so shall they, who resist and overcome him, be admitted to the tree of life that grows in the midst of the paradise of God, and shall go no more out for ever^p.

“Nor will he withhold from them any thing that is truly good.” Were wealth and honour good for them here below, they should possess it. If God withhold those things from his people now, he does it because he knows that they would not, on the whole, be good for them. He that gave his own Son to die for them, will assuredly give them all other things that will promote their welfare. They shall never want any thing for body or soul, for time or eternity.]

INFER—

1. How truly blessed are they who are upright before God!

[This is the Psalmist’s own reflection^q. He varies indeed the *term* by which he describes the people of God; but his *meaning* is the same; for none can be upright except those who trust in him, because nothing but the grace of God can make them so: nor do any trust in him without receiving that grace which shall make them upright. The manner in which he expresses his reflection, is worthy of notice; he does not merely *assert* it as a fact, or *appeal to men* for the truth of it, but *appeals to God himself* respecting it. “O Lord God of

^m Jam. iv. 6.

ⁿ Heb. iv. 16.

^o 2 Cor. xii. 9.

^p Rev. ii. 7.

^q ver. 12.

hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee." How strong must have been the conviction of it in his mind! And can any thing be more clear? To have the LORD GOD himself for their light and defence, and to have all the blessings of grace and glory ensured to them by the unalterable promise of JEHOVAH; what can they have more? Let every upright soul then rejoice; for he is and shall be blessed. And let all be stirred up to walk worthy of their high calling. So shall God be glorified in them; and they, ere long, be glorified with him for evermore.]

2. In what a pitiable state are the generality of mankind!

[There are many who are honest and just even among the heathen. But, alas! the generality labour not in earnest to find out their duty; nor do they know any thing of that unreserved devotedness to God which characterizes the true Christian. Is God then a sun to *them*? Is he not rather a cloud of darkness to them, or rather, I should say, a consuming fire? Is he a shield to *them*? Is he not rather an irresistible adversary^s? Will he give *them* grace and glory? Shall he not rather visit them with wrath and fiery indignation^t? Will he withhold from *them* no good? Is there not rather a time shortly coming when they shall not have so much as a drop of water to cool their tongue? O that men would consider this! Surely their state calls for much compassion. Let every one lay this to heart. Let every one seek to be found "an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile." And let it be the one ambition of us all to be found of God in peace, without spot and blameless^u.]

^r Exod. xiv. 20. Heb. xii. 29.

^s Matt. v. 25.

^t Rom. ii. 8.

^u 2 Pet. iii. 14.

DCXLII.

ATTENTION TO GOD'S WORD ENCOURAGED.

Ps. lxxxv. 8. *I will hear what God the Lord will speak: for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints: but let them not turn again to folly.*

IF we would obtain any blessing from God, we must seek it in the exercise of fervent prayer. Yet shall we not really obtain a blessing, unless we look up to God in expectation of an answer to our prayers. In this respect we must resemble a beggar who supplicates for alms. He is not satisfied with having presented his petition: he waits for an answer; and never considers himself as having succeeded in his

requests, till he is in the actual enjoyment of the desired boon. This waiting spirit was exemplified in David, when he said, "In the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and *will look up*^a." In like manner it is illustrated in the psalm before us, which seems to have been written after the Babylonish captivity, but previous to the complete and quiet settlement of the people in their own land. The petitions which are offered are extremely urgent: "Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thine anger towards us to cease! Wilt thou be angry with us for ever? wilt thou draw out thine anger to all generations? Wilt thou not revive us again, that thy people may rejoice in thee? Shew us thy mercy, O Lord, and grant us thy salvation^b." The petitioner, then, determines to listen to God's voice, in the hope that he shall, in due season, receive an answer of peace: "I will hear what God the Lord will speak."

Let us, for the elucidation of this subject, consider,

I. The attention to be paid to the word of God—

[The word, whether as contained in the inspired volume, or as delivered to us by the ministers of Christ, is truly and properly God's; and, as his, it should be received by us with the deepest reverence. When St. Paul ministered at Thessalonica, the people "received his word, not as the word of man, but as the word of God:" and for that he specially commends them^c. And thus, whether written or preached, it must be received by us. Whether we open the inspired volume ourselves, or go up to hear it in the house of God, we must, like Cornelius and his family, place ourselves as in the immediate presence of God, "to hear all that is commanded us of God^d:" and with meek submission we must say, like Samuel, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth^e."]]

But in our text we are informed,

II. What particular reason there is for that attention—

["The Lord will speak peace unto his people and to his saints:" however much they have deserved his wrath and indignation, he will not retain his anger against them, if only they give ear to his word, and set themselves diligently to obey it. To the impenitent he never utters a single word of peace:

^a Ps. v. 3.

^b ver. 4—7.

^c 1 Thess. ii. 13.

^d Acts x. 33.

^e 1 Sam. iii. 10.

but to the humble and contrite soul, that relies on his promises in Christ Jesus, there is not a syllable throughout all the inspired volume that leads to discouragement: grace, mercy, and peace are held forth to all of this character. These, though but in an infantine state, are God's "saints and people;" and for them are prepared "a peace that passeth all understanding," and "a joy that is unspeakable and glorified." Shall such tidings, then, be announced, and the trembling soul not listen to them? If there were nothing but precepts proclaimed, they should be listened to with the most reverent attention: but, when nothing but the voice of love and mercy sounds in our ears, it must be strange indeed if we do not hear it with the devoutest gratitude, and treasure it up in our minds as a source of the richest consolation.]

With this attention, however, must be blended a regard to,

III. The ultimate scope and object of all his gracious declarations—

[Sin, under what circumstances soever it be committed, is "folly" in the extreme: and to turn us from that folly is the true end of all that God has done for us. "Our Lord Jesus Christ gave himself for us, to deliver us from this present evil world, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works^f." To him, therefore, we must cleave in a way of holiness, never for a moment turning back to our evil ways, or even so much as "looking back after having once put our hands to the plough^g." For, whatever we may have experienced, it will all cease to be of any value in the sight of God the very instant we depart from his holy ways^h: yea, it will be "better never to have known the way of righteousness at all, than after having known it, to depart from itⁱ." It is "by patient continuance in well-doing that we must seek for eternal life^k;" and only by enduring to the end, can we ever attain the promised salvation^l.]

Let me, then, ADDRESS—

1. The inattentive hearer—

[God speaks in his word: but the generality of the world, though within reach of the sound, hear him not: "They have no ears to hear." But let me ask, Will you be always able to shut your ears against his voice? Will you not hear him when he shall summon both the quick and dead to his tribunal? Will you be deaf to his voice when he shall pronounce upon you that awful doom, "Depart accursed into everlasting

^f Tit. ii. 14.

^g Luke ix. 62.

^h Ezek. xxxiii. 18.

ⁱ 2 Pet. ii. 21.

^k Rom. ii. 7.

^l Mark xiii. 13.

fire prepared for the devil and his angels?" If, then, you must listen to him in that day, would it not be wise to regard him now? Be assured the day will come when you will regret that presumptuous indifference which now you manifest; and when, if you turn not to him in sincerity and truth, you will "call upon the rocks and mountains in vain to hide you from his wrath.]"

2. The backsliding professor—

[What have you gained by returning to the world? Nay, have you not lost the peace which you once enjoyed? You may pretend to possess a quiet mind; but you do not: or, if you do, it is only by drowning the voice of conscience, and silencing its remonstrances. Compare the penitential sorrows which you once felt, with the liveliest joys that you now experience; and then say, whether you were not really happier when weeping for your sins, than you now are when launching into either the cares or pleasures of the world? I well know the answer you must give, if you will speak truly; and therefore you, of all men, are constrained to acknowledge the folly of sin. "Remember, then, whence you have fallen, and repent; and do your first works^m." But if you will not repent and turn to God, then prepare to meet him in judgment, and to receive at his hands the just recompence of your deeds.]

3. The obedient saint—

[It is your privilege to have your "peace flowing down like a river." And such it will be, if you apply to your souls the many "great and precious promises" which are given you in the Gospel. Search them out, therefore, and treasure them up in your minds. Hear God himself speaking to you in them: and so embrace them, as to live upon them, and to derive from them all the consolation which they are calculated to impart. In this way will you be kept from spiritual declension, and will be enabled to "cleanse yourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of Godⁿ."]

^m Rev. ii. 5.

ⁿ 2 Cor. vii. 1.

DCXLIII.

THE PERFECTIONS OF GOD RECONCILED IN CHRIST JESUS.

Ps. lxxxv. 9, 10. *Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him, that glory may dwell in our land. Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.*

WE are told in Scripture, that "the prayer of the upright is God's delight:" and in instances without number has he evinced the truth of this saying. If

only we wait upon him with humility, and listen to his voice, "he will speak peace unto us^a." The writer of this psalm, which was most probably composed after the return of the Jews from their captivity in Babylon, records for our instruction, that he sought not the Lord in vain. The people, though restored, found many difficulties to encounter: and the Psalmist earnestly entreated God to perfect for them what he had begun, and to establish the nation in righteousness and peace^b. In answer to this prayer, God assured him, not only that the blessings which had been solicited should be conferred, but that the more glorious redemption, which was shadowed forth by those events, should in due time be accomplished. In this sense of the passage all the best interpreters concur: and it perfectly accords with the general language of the Prophets, which, in addition to the literal meaning, has also a spiritual or mystical sense; and which, under images apparently relating only to one peculiar people, has respect to Christ and his Church to the end of time. Taking the words then in a prophetic sense, we may notice in them,

I. The obstacles on God's part to the salvation of man—

When man fell, the "truth and righteousness" of God required that the penalties of his transgression should be executed upon him—

[To man in Paradise, God gave liberty to eat of every tree in the garden, except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil: but in reference to that tree he said, "In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." This death comprehended not merely the dissolution of the body, but the destruction also of the soul, even that everlasting destruction from which the second Adam has delivered us: according as it is written, "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is *eternal* life through Jesus Christ our Lord^c." From the moment therefore of his transgression, man became obnoxious to this punishment; and the truth of God was pledged to inflict it. Moreover, God as a righteous Governor could not but maintain the honour of his law. His justice was engaged not to suffer the violations of that law to pass unpunished.]

^a ver. 8.

^b ver. 1—7.

^c Rom. v. 12—19. and vi. 23.

This presented an apparently insurmountable obstacle to man's salvation—

[To say that God could not have found some other means of satisfying the demands of truth and righteousness, would be presumptuous, because the resources of his wisdom are infinite: but we are perfectly justified in saying, that he could not save man unless some way of satisfying the demands of truth and righteousness were found. However God might desire to exercise mercy, and to be at peace with man, he could not do it at the expense of any other of his perfections. St. Paul himself frequently assigns this limit to the divine procedure: "God cannot lie," says he: and again, "It is impossible for God to lie:" and again, "God cannot deny himself." Again he says, "Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid." It is plain, therefore, that unless a way could be found for "mercy and truth to meet together, and righteousness and peace to kiss each other," no hope could be entertained for fallen man: the judgments denounced against him must be executed; and, having partaken with the fallen angels in their guilt, he must partake with them also in their misery.]

But, formidable as these obstacles were, we behold in our text,

II. The way in which they are removed—

All has been done for man that was required of man—

[A substitute has been provided for our guilty race. The Son of God himself has come down from heaven, and been made under the law, that, in the very nature that had sinned, he might bear the penalty of sin, and fulfil the utmost possible demands of that law which we had broken. True it is, that the law denounced eternal death; and that Christ bore that penalty only for a season: but then it must be remembered, that he was God, as well as man: and from his godhead is derived a virtue on all that he did or suffered, a virtue which is fully adequate to the obedience or sufferings of the whole world. Indeed the law gains more honour by the sufferings of our incarnate God, than it ever could have gained from the sufferings of the whole human race: for, if man had undertaken to pay the penalty, no time could ever have arrived, when it might be said, "Now divine justice is satisfied, and the law has received a full compensation for the dishonour done to it:" but in the sufferings of God's co-equal Son there is "a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world." In his obedience also to the law there is an honour done to it far beyond all that could have accrued to it from the obedience of man. That God himself should become subject to his own law, and fulfil in his own

person all that is required of his creatures, is such an exalted honour to the law, that it may well be regarded as a sufficient substitute for the obedience of man, and as an adequate ground for the justification of all who shall trust in it^d.]

Thus a way is opened for man's salvation, in perfect consistency with every perfection of the Deity—

["Truth and righteousness" are now completely satisfied. They demanded a perfect fulfilment of the law; and the law has been perfectly fulfilled: they demanded the penalty of death to be inflicted on account of sin; and it has been inflicted on the sinner's substitute. Now as a debt, discharged by a surety, can no longer be demanded of the principal, so can our debt no longer be demanded of us, if we plead what Christ has done and suffered for us. And, as a thing purchased for any person, belongs to him for whom it was purchased, so we, who have all the glory of heaven purchased for us by our adorable Emmanuel, have a right to it, if we plead the purchase he has made. Hence it appears that truth and righteousness are no longer against us, but are rather on our side; and, instead of demanding, as before, the destruction of our souls, are become advocates for our free and full salvation. Justice now says, Pay them, O God, what their Redeemer has purchased for them: and Truth says, Fulfil to them, O Lord, all that thou hast promised to those who believe in Jesus.]

But let us more particularly consider,

III. The blessed consequences of the removal of them—

[Salvation is now accessible to all: it is come both to Jews and Gentiles: "It is near unto us." To those especially "who fear the Lord," it is near, even "in their mouth and in their heart^e." No longer does the fiery sword prohibit our access to the tree of life. "Mercy" has now full scope for the freest exercise. God can now be "a just God, and yet a Saviour^f." He "declares his righteousness," no less than his mercy, "in the forgiveness of sins; and is just, and yet the justifier of all who believe in Christ^g." Hence he proclaims "peace" to all that are afar off^h. He establishes his tabernacle in the midst of us: and invites all to come unto him, even to his mercy-seat, in full assurance of faith. "In every corner of the land his glory dwellsⁱ:" and all who truly fear him may have daily "fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." *The manner in which this assertion is made,* deserves particular attention: "*Surely* his salvation is nigh them that fear him." This blessed truth admits not of the smallest doubt: it may be

^d Isai. xlii. 21.

^e Rom. x. 8, 9.

^f Isai. xlv. 21.

^g Rom. iii. 25, 26.

^h Eph. ii. 17.

ⁱ Isai. iv. 5.

fully and firmly depended upon. A spring of great elastic force does not more certainly rise up when the superincumbent pressure is withdrawn from it, than mercy issues from the bosom of our God now that the obstacles to its exercise are removed.]

BEHOLD then how replete this passage is with,

1. Instruction to the ignorant—

[Men differ much about the way of salvation: but this passage clearly determines who is right. That plan of salvation, and that alone, is right, which is carried into effect in perfect consistency with all the attributes of God. But there is no way that provides for the honour of God's truth and righteousness, but that which is revealed in the Gospel, the way of salvation by faith in Christ. Nothing but Christ's obedience unto death ever did, or ever could, answer the demands of law and justice: nothing but Christ's completion of that work in the quality of our Surety could enable the sinner to say to the supreme Governor of the universe, "Avert thy wrath from me; for I have already endured it in my Surety; and give me everlasting glory, for I, in the person of my Surety, have fulfilled all righteousness, and perfectly obeyed thy law." But the Believer may adopt this language; since God himself has said, that "Christ, who knew no sin, was made sin for us, that we, who had no righteousness, might be made the righteousness of God in him." Let the uninstructed bear this in mind, and "determine to know nothing" as a ground of hope towards God, "but Jesus Christ, and him crucified."]

2. Terror to the presumptuous—

[It is surprising what a measure of confidence some will express, notwithstanding neither their principles nor their conduct at all accord with the Scriptures of Truth. But we must declare to all, that both in the foundation of our hope, and in the superstructure built upon it, "Mercy and truth must meet together, and righteousness and peace must kiss each other." We have before shewn, that no one perfection of the Deity will display itself at the expense of another: all must unite and harmonize in every work of his: it is as impossible for God in any one instance to violate his righteousness or truth, as for him to cease from his existence. In us also must those graces which correspond with his perfections be found in united and harmonious exercise: we must be just and true, and merciful and kind: yea, it is by our conformity to the Divine image in righteousness and true holiness, that we must judge of our state before him: for, however accurate our views of his Gospel may be, it is a certain truth, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord:" "Truth must spring out of the earth, if ever righteousness shall look down from heaven^k."]

^k ver. 11. with Isai. xlv. 8.

3. Consolation to the timid—

[It is frequently amongst those who truly “fear God” a matter of doubt and anxiety, whether God *can* pardon them: they see their manifold imperfections in so strong a light, that God appears to them bound, as it were, in justice, to banish them from his presence, yea, and bound in truth also to execute his threatenings upon them. But let such persons view God, not as he is in himself, but as he is in Christ Jesus. There it is that he must be seen as a God of love and peace. There it is that the drooping penitent may behold him “as a reconciled God, who will never impute to him his trespasses¹.” Yes, in Christ Jesus, “God is not only merciful and kind, but faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness^m.” Dismiss then your fears, ye trembling saints; and put your trust in Him, who has in so wonderful a way removed all the obstacles to your salvation. The veil of the temple was rent in twain on purpose to shew you, that henceforth there is free access to God for every sinner upon earth, and that all who approach him in that new and living way, by faith in Christ Jesus, shall surely find acceptance with him. If God will be just in punishing the ungodly, he will be no less just to his Son in pardoning all who plead the merit of his blood: and if he will be true in executing his threatenings, he will be no less true in fulfilling his exceeding great and precious promises. Only rely on them, and plead them at a throne of grace, and you shall never, never be disappointed of your hope.]

¹ 2 Cor. v. 19, 20.^m 1 John i. 9.

DCXLIV.

A PRAYING SPIRIT EXEMPLIFIED.

Ps. lxxxvi. 1—5. *Bow down thine ear, O Lord! hear me; for I am poor and needy. Preserve my soul; for I am holy. O thou my God, save thy servant that trusteth in thee! Be merciful unto me, O Lord! for I cry unto thee daily. Rejoice the soul of thy servant: for unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee.*

TRUE and genuine piety cannot always be certainly known by men's intercourse with their fellow-creatures. Appearances may be so plausible, that they cannot, except by Him who searcheth the heart, be distinguished from realities. But in their intercourse with the Deity, the truth or falsehood of their

profession may be clearly discerned. The most refined hypocrite may, by examining the state of his soul in his private devotions, obtain the certain means of discovering his proper character, provided he have his standard rightly fixed, and his test impartially applied. To furnish such a standard, is our object in the present discourse. We here behold the man after God's own heart drawing nigh to a throne of grace, and pouring out his soul in supplications before God: and we wish to call your attention especially to the spirit which he manifested in this sacred duty, since it will serve as an excellent criterion whereby to try and judge ourselves.

Let us then consider,

I. The subject-matter of his prayer—

It should seem that David was now under great affliction, either from the persecutions of Saul, or from the unnatural rebellion of his son Absalom: and his prayers may well be understood, in the first instance, as relating to his temporal trials. But, as it is of his soul that he chiefly speaks, we shall dwell upon his prayer principally in that view. Let us notice then,

1. His petitions—

[St. Paul, in both his Epistles to Timothy, prays, that "grace, and mercy, and peace" may be multiplied upon him. These three terms comprehend the substance of the Psalmist's petitions. He desired "grace," to "preserve and save his soul." He desired "mercy;" "Be merciful unto me, O Lord!" And he desired "peace;" "Rejoice the soul of thy servant, O Lord!" Now these are such petitions as every sinner in the universe should offer. There are no other that can be compared with them, in point of importance to the souls of men. As for all the objects of time and sense, they sink into perfect insignificance before the things which appertain to our everlasting salvation. To all therefore I would say, Seek what David sought. Cry mightily to God to have mercy upon you, and to preserve and save your soul: and when you have done that, you may fitly pray also for that consolation and joy, which a sense of his pardoning love will produce in the soul.]

2. His pleas—

[These are taken, partly, *from what he experienced in his own soul*; and, partly, *from the character of God himself*.

Observe how he urges, *what he experienced in his own soul*. The things which God himself requires from us, in order to the acceptance of our prayers, are, *a deep sense of our necessities, an entire surrender of our souls to him, a reliance on him for all needful blessings, and a continual application to him in a way of fervent and believing prayer*. Behold, these are the very things which David at this time experienced, and which therefore he pleaded before God as evidences of the sincerity of his prayers: “Bow down thine ear, O Lord, and hear me; for *I am poor and needy!*” And who is there that must not adopt the same acknowledgment? Who that considers, how destitute his soul is of all that is truly good, will not find these words exactly descriptive of his state? Again, the Psalmist prays, “Preserve my soul; for *I am holy.*” We must not imagine that David here meant to boast of his high attainments in holiness: the term “holy” is applied in Scripture to every thing that is dedicated to God, though from its very nature it cannot possess any inherent sanctity: the temple of God, the vessels of the sanctuary, and all the offerings, were holy, because they were *set apart for God*. So David here speaks of himself as “set apart for God^a,” and his expression is exactly equivalent to that which he uses in another place; “I am THINE; save me^b.” This then is another plea which it becomes us all to use. As the Israelites were “a *holy nation*,”^c so are we^d: and if we have given up ourselves unreservedly to God, we may well hope, that he will hear and answer our petitions. Once more David says, “Save me; for *I trust in Thee.*” This also was a most acceptable plea. If we ask with a wavering and doubtful mind, we can never succeed^e: but the prayer of faith must of necessity prevail^f. The suppliant who truly and habitually trusts in God, can never be disappointed. Lastly, David says, “*I cry unto thee daily.*” “*Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.*” God “will be inquired of, to do for us the things that he has promised.” “If we ask, we shall have; if we seek, we shall find; if we knock, it shall be opened unto us^g,” but, if we ask not, we shall not, we cannot, have^h.

But David’s chief plea is taken *from the character of God himself*: and this is, in reality, the most satisfactory to the human mind, and most acceptable to the Divine Majesty, who “will work for his own great Name’s sake,” when all other grounds of hope are subverted and lost. Towards his creatures generally, whether rational or irrational, God is “good;” but towards the children of men he is “ready to forgive, and plen-

^a See Ps. iv. 3.

^b Ps. cxix. 94.

^c Exod. xix. 6.

^d 1 Pet. ii. 9.

^e Jam. i. 6, 7.

^f Matt. xxi. 22. Mark xi. 24.

^g Matt. vii. 7, 8.

^h Jam. iv. 2.

teous in mercy unto all that call upon him." No mother is so tender towards her new-born child, as God is towards his penitent and believing people. He is far more "ready to forgive," than they are to ask forgiveness; and will multiply his pardons beyond all the multitude of their offencesⁱ. "Where sin has abounded, his grace shall much more abound^k." The freeness and fulness of God's grace should be clearly seen, and confidently relied upon: but then we must never forget, that this glorious perfection shines only in the face of Jesus Christ. It is in Christ only that God can pardon sinners in consistency with his justice: but in Christ, "he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness^l." In Christ therefore, and in God as reconciled to us through the blood of his Son, must be all our hope. If we rest solely on Christ's obedience unto death, all will be well; for "in him all the promises of God are yea, and amen^m." But, if we look at God in any way but as in the person of Christ, we shall surely find him "a consuming fireⁿ."]

The prayer itself not calling for any farther elucidation, we proceed to notice,

II. The spirit manifested in it—

Here the subject is peculiarly important, because it exhibits in so striking a view the dispositions of mind which we should invariably exercise in our approaches to the Divine Majesty. In this example of David, then observe,

1. His meekness and modesty—

[He approaches God, as a sinner ought to do, with reverential awe. He exhibits none of that unhallowed boldness, and indecent familiarity, which are so commonly to be noticed in the prayers of many at this day. It is much to be lamented that many address God almost as if he were an equal. We speak not now of that irreverence with which people, altogether ignorant of religion, conduct themselves in the public services of the church; (though that is deeply to be deplored;) but of the state of mind manifested by many religious people, ministers, as well as others, in their public and social addresses to the throne of Heaven. How different, alas! is it from that which is inculcated, both in the Scriptures^o, and in the Liturgy of our Church! In the Liturgy, the people are exhorted to "accompany their minister with a pure heart and humble voice to the throne of the heavenly grace:" and, in another place, "to make their humble confession to Almighty God, *meekly kneeling* on their knees."

ⁱ Isai. lv. 7—9.

^k Rom. v. 20.

^l Rom. iii. 24, 25.

^m 2 Cor. i. 20. ⁿ Heb. xii. 29. ^o Ps. lxxxix. 7. Eccl. v. 2.

This is a lovely state of mind, and as opposite to that which many religious people manifest, as light to darkness. Many whose religious principles differ widely from the self-applauding Pharisee, resemble him very nearly in his spirit and conduct: but let us, on the contrary, imitate the publican, who, “not venturing so much as to lift up his eyes to heaven, smote upon his breast, and cried, God be merciful to me a sinner.”]

2. His humility and contrition—

[He felt himself a guilty and undone creature, deserving of God’s everlasting displeasure: and hence he cried so repeatedly for mercy and salvation. And here again we see how the same views and dispositions are inculcated in the services of our Church. Let any one peruse the confession which is daily offered — — — or that which we are taught to utter at the table of the Lord — — — or let him read the responses after every one of the Ten Commandments — — — or the repeated cries, “Lord, have mercy upon me! Christ, have mercy upon me! Lord, have mercy upon me!” and he will see at once, what a beautiful harmony there is between our Liturgy and the Holy Scriptures; and what distinguished saints all her members would be, if the Spirit of her Liturgy were transfused into their minds. This is the state of mind which, above all, we would recommend to those who desire to find acceptance with God: for “to this man will God look, even to him who is of a broken and contrite spirit^p.” this is the sacrifice which, above all, God requires, and which he has assured us “he will never despise^q.”]

3. His faith and love—

[David did not so view his own sinfulness as to distrust the mercy of his heavenly Father; but rather took occasion from his own sinfulness to magnify still more the free and superabounding grace of God. In this, his example is especially to be followed. Nothing can warrant us to limit the mercy of our God. O how “ready is he to forgive” returning penitents! Of this, the conduct of the father towards the repenting prodigal is a lively and instructive image. In that parable, the compassion of God towards returning sinners is, as it were, exhibited even to the eye of sense. Let us then, whatever be our state, bear this in mind, that unbelief is a sin which binds all our other sins upon us. Never, under any circumstances, should we harbour it for a moment. It is enough to have resisted God’s authority, without proceeding further to rob him of the brightest jewels of his crown—his grace and mercy. The goodness of God, as described in our text, and in another subsequent part of this psalm^r, — — — is a suffi-

^p Isai. lvii. 15. and lxx. 2.

^q Ps. li. 17.

^r ver. 15.

cient pledge to us, that of those who come to him in his Son's name, he never did, nor ever will, cast out so much as one.]

4. His zeal and earnestness—

[The diversified petitions and pleas which we have already considered, together with the renewed urgency of his supplications in the verse following my text^s, shew, how determined David was not to rest, till he had obtained favour of the Lord. And thus must we also “continue instant in prayer:” we must “watch unto it with all perseverance;” we must “pray always, and not faint.” Alas! how are we condemned in our own minds for our manifold neglects, and for our lukewarmness in prayer to God! But we must not rest satisfied with confessing these neglects: we should remedy them, and break through this supineness, and correct this negligence, and lie at Bethesda's pool till the angel come for our relief. This is suggested to us in our text. What we translate, “I cry unto thee *daily*,” is, in the margin, “I cry unto thee *all the day*.” O that there were in us such a heart! O that our sense of need were so deep, our desire of mercy so ardent, and our faith in God so assured, that we were drawn to God with an irresistible and abiding impulse; and that, like Jacob of old, we “wrestled with him day and night, saying, I will not let thee go except thou bless me^t.” Such prayer could not but prevail; and such a suppliant could not but find everlasting acceptance with God, who is so “plenteous in mercy, so ready to forgive^u.”]

^s ver. 6.

^t Gen. xxxii. 24, 26, 28. with Hos. xii. 3—5.

^u Luke xviii. 1—8.

DCXLV.

HOW TO WALK WITH GOD.

Ps. lxxxvi. 11. *Teach me thy way, O Lord! I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name.*

IN mercy, no less than in judgment, does God see fit to afflict his people: he does it “for their profit, that they may in a more abundant measure be partakers of his holiness^a.” And when we are brought nigh to him by means of our afflictions, then have they answered the great end for which they were sent.

David was a man who enjoyed much communion with God; and probably it was to the extraordinary trials with which, for many years, he was visited, that he was indebted, under God, for that sublime

^a Heb. xii. 10.

piety which shone so conspicuously in him. In the psalm before us, he pours out his soul before God under some great and heavy affliction, probably under the persecutions of Saul: but it had produced the most beneficial effect upon his mind; seeing that it stirred up within him more ardent desires after God, and determined him, through grace, to walk more diligently in the ways of God: "Teach me thy way, O Lord! I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name."

In these words we see *the two great requisites for an acceptable walk with God*; which are,

I. An illumination of mind, that we may know His ways—

[We know nothing of God or his ways, any farther than he has seen fit to reveal himself to us — — — (How little our unassisted reason can teach us, has abundantly appeared in all the philosophers of Greece and Rome.) Least of all can we know any thing of the way which he has appointed for our reconciliation with him through the blood of his Son: respecting *that* no finite intelligence could have formed any conception, if it had not been made known to us by a special communication from heaven — — — But we need also, yet further, a special revelation of it to our own souls. The mere report, as contained in the written word, is not *of itself* sufficient to bring us to a saving knowledge of these sublime truths: Christ must be revealed *in* us^b, as well as *to* us, or we shall never "know him as we ought." These great things are, indeed, "freely given to us of God:" yet must we "receive the Spirit of God, in order that we may know them" aright^c: He must, as "a Spirit of wisdom and revelation," open the eyes of our understanding, before we can comprehend^d this great mystery, so as really to acquiesce in it, and cordially to come to Christ as "the way, the truth, and the life^e" — — — If the Apostles themselves, after above three years' attendance on the public and private instructions of our Lord, yet needed to have "their understandings opened, in order that they might understand the Scriptures^f," there can be no doubt but that the same is necessary for us all; and that we all need to cry with David, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may see wondrous things out of thy law^g;" or, as he speaks more fully in another psalm, "Shew me thy ways, O Lord; teach me thy paths;

^b Gal. i. 16.

^c John xiv. 6.

^e 1 Cor. ii. 12.

^f Luke xxiv. 45.

^d Eph. i. 17, 18.

^g Ps. exix. 18.

lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation: on thee do I wait all the day^h.”]

To this must be added,

II. A concentration of our souls, that we may walk in it—

[Our heart by nature is divided amongst ten thousand vanities, all of which are sought in preference to God. Whatever can contribute to the satisfaction of the carnal mind becomes, on that account, an object of desire; and according as our prospects of attaining it are varied, our hopes and fears, our joys and sorrows, are called forth into powerful and successive operation. But the powers of the soul are not to be so abused: they were given by God in order that they might be employed in his service: and in order to an acceptable walk with him, they must all centre in him. He will not accept a divided heart. Whosoever possesses that, “will be found faulty^l. God says, “My son, give ME thine heart^k:” and it must be given to him entire. To him it must be *exclusively* devoted, in all its faculties: at least, nothing must be an object of hope or fear, joy or sorrow, but in subserviency to his glory, and in obedience to his command. “We cannot serve God and Mammon too^l.” There is “a singleness of eye,” and “a singleness of heart,” that is indispensable to a right walking with God^m: without that we cannot be “Israelites indeedⁿ,” or approve ourselves to “Him who searcheth the heart and trieth the reins” — — —]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who think it an easy thing to serve God—

[Many have an idea that this is so easy a matter, that they may execute it at any time, whenever satiety shall have rendered them less anxious about carnal enjoyments, or the approach of death shall render a preparation for eternity more an object of desire. But supposing it to be so easy, how great must be their guilt in neglecting it! Is it so easy a matter to please, and serve, and honour God: and will they not do it? Then “out of their own mouth shall they be judged:” and the heaviest condemnation shall be awarded to them, because they would rather rebel against their God and “provoke the eyes of his glory” by their impieties, than they would take on them, what they themselves acknowledged to be, his “light and easy yoke.”

But if it be, indeed, so easy, try it; and see if it be so easy to come to God in his appointed “way.” See, if you can come with brokenness of heart to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to the

^h Ps. xxv. 4, 5.

ⁱ Hos. x. 2.

^k Prov. xxiii. 26.

^l Matt. vi. 24.

^m Acts ii. 46. Col. iii. 22.

ⁿ John i. 47.

Father through him, imploring mercy solely through the blood and righteousness of your adorable Saviour — — — You will soon find that the proud heart of man does not easily stoop to so humiliating a way of approaching God. If you might come in your own name, and in your own righteousness, you would perhaps consent to do it: but to come with penitential sorrow in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in a simple dependence on his atoning sacrifice, is a work to which you are utterly averse, and which none but God can enable you to perform.

Again, if it be so easy to gather in all the affections of the soul, and to fix them exclusively on God, do it. But you will find that this is far beyond the power of man to effect. In order to this, you must have “a new heart given you, and a right spirit renewed within you:” nor can any power short of that which created the world at first form such a new creation within you. Lay aside, then, your vain conceits respecting this matter; and begin, without delay, that work, which a whole life is short enough to accomplish, and which, if not wrought speedily, may soon become a subject of remediless and endless woe — — —]

2. Those who desire, but find it difficult to serve him—

[You, probably, have depended too much on the resolutions you have formed. I am far from disapproving of resolutions, if formed in dependence upon God. Joshua's has been the just subject of applause in all ages: “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord^o.” But Peter has sufficiently shewn how weak all human strength is, when unaided from on high. It is by prayer alone that we can hope to prevail, either for the illumination of our minds, or the concentration of our souls, both of which are so necessary in this good work. David was no novice in the divine life; yet did he cry, “Teach me thy way, O Lord; and unite my heart to fear thee!” And, if he had not so cried to the Lord, in vain would he have said, “*I will walk in thy truth.*” If then he, notwithstanding his attainments, still had recourse to God in prayer, know, that there is no other way for *us* to prevail; and that, if you would succeed according to your desire, you must cry day and night to God in prayer, and bring down from him those supplies of grace and strength which are so needful for you — — —]

3. Those who are really walking with God according to his command—

[Be not discouraged, if you should find that, notwithstanding your good endeavours, you make not all the advance

^o Josh. xxiv. 15.

that you could wish. You yet have flesh, as well as spirit; and “if the spirit lust against the flesh, so will the flesh still strive against the spirit^p.” You will yet find a law of sin in your members, warring against the law of your minds, and constraining you at times to cry out, “O! wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me^q?” But go forward, in humble dependence on God. “Continue instant in prayer.” Let not your hands hang down; but let them be stretched forth to God in continual supplications; and he will come to your relief. He will embitter to you the vanities on which you are tempted to set your affections, and will gradually get himself the victory over all the enemies of your souls. It was only “by little and little that he drove out the Canaanites” before his people of old; and it is not to be expected that you should have no difficulties to contend with, no conflicts to sustain. But remember where your strength is; and, “as ye have received the Lord Jesus Christ, so *walk ye in him*, rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith as ye have been taught, and abounding therein with thanksgiving^r :” so will he “preserve you blameless unto his heavenly kingdom,” and “present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.”]

^p Gal. v. 17.

^q Rom. vii. 23, 24.

^r Col. ii. 6, 7.

DCXLVI.

THE GLORY OF ZION.

Ps. lxxxvii. 3. *Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God.*

THE city here spoken of, is Zion: of whose praises the whole Scriptures speak. She is represented as “beautiful for situation, and as being the joy of the whole earth^a.” Even God himself is represented as delighting in her, and as “loving the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob^b.” Why she, and the Church which is represented by her, are so high in the estimation of God and man, it will be not unimportant to consider.

To bring the subject fully before you, I will shew,

I. What glorious things are spoken of her—

Amongst the many things spoken of her in Scripture, she is particularly commended,

1. As the residence of the Deity—

^a Ps. xlvi. 2.

^b ver. 2.

[God chose Zion of old for his habitation, and delighted to make that above all other cities in the universe “the place of his rest^c.” There he abode in that bright symbol of his presence, the Shechinah, “dwelling between the cherubims^d.” There his people assembled by his appointment to worship him: thence he dispensed his blessings: and thence in due time he sent forth his everlasting Gospel^e.

Thus under the Christian dispensation he has honoured his Church, dwelling in it; as he has said, “I am with you alway, even to the end of the world.” There he reveals his glory, even “all the glory of the godhead, in the face of Jesus Christ” — — — There he makes known all the riches of his grace and love — — — There he communes with his people who present their supplications before him, “drawing nigh to them, whilst they draw nigh to him;” and giving them answers of peace; not indeed *visibly*, as by the Urim and Thummim of old, but *really*, and satisfactorily to their souls — — — In a word, though unknown in every other place under heaven, “He is known in her palaces as a refuge^f.”]

2. As the birth-place of the saints—

[This is particularly noticed in the psalm before us: “Of Zion it shall be said, This and that man is born in her^g.” Under the Jewish dispensation conversions were comparatively few; but under the Christian dispensation they are very numerous; though at present they are only as the drop before the shower. On the day of Pentecost the Spirit was poured out in richer abundance, and thousands were converted in a day: and still, wherever the Gospel is preached in sincerity and truth, there the power of God accompanies the word, and “subdues the souls of men to the obedience of faith.” Amongst the heathen, Satan maintains an universal sway: and amongst those Christians who are not blessed with a faithful ministry, very few are ever rescued from his dominion: but where the cross of Christ is exalted, there will be found “a stir among the dry bones,” and multitudes will be born to God. And may we not ask, Whether this is not confirmed by the experience of many here present? Once you were dead in trespasses and sins, and as destitute of all desire after God, as any people in the world: but, through the preaching of a crucified Saviour in this place, your souls have been “turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God.” Here also, when you have been mourning on account of your indwelling corruptions, God has “given you the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness^h;” so that you can confidently say, “I was born there.” Blessed testimony, that may well endear to you

^c Ps. cxxxii. 13, 14.

^d Ps. lxxx. 1.

^e Isai. ii. 3.

^f Ps. xlvi. 3.

^g ver. 5, 6.

^h Isai. lxi. 3.

the gates of Zion, and render her more lovely in your eyes than all the palaces in the universe!]

3. As an emblem of heaven itself—

[Such it really is: for all who are born in her “are come unto Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem^l.” Though she is a spiritual edifice, she has her foundations, her walls, her gates; all of which are found also in that heavenly Zion which St. John saw, even in “that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, and having the glory of God^k.” And both the one city and the other “are of pure gold^l.” Each of them too, amongst the many distinctions which they enjoy above all earthly cities, have a light peculiar to themselves. Of our Zion it is said, “The sun is no more her light by day, neither for brightness does the moon give light unto her; but the Lord is unto her an everlasting light, and her God her glory^m.” And thus it is also in the heavenly Zion: “The city has no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God does lighten it; and the Lamb is the light thereofⁿ.” It is but one family that is inhabiting both the one city and the other, “even the family of our Lord Jesus Christ^o;” and their employments are altogether the same: for whilst the one are “rejoicing in the Lord always” here below^p, the other are incessantly engaged in singing praises to him above, even “to Him, who loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood, and made them kings and priests unto their God; to him, I say, do they ascribe all glory and dominion for ever and ever^q.”]

II. The effect which these testimonies should have upon us—

Surely, when the Church is so high in the estimation of God,

1. We should inquire what place she holds in our esteem—

[Never has she had, at least in a spiritual view, any visible glory. In the days of the prophets, her limits were contracted, and her members poor, despised, persecuted. In the days of Christ and his Apostles, though her limits were enlarged, she, like her Lord himself, had “no beauty nor comeliness for which she was to be desired^r.” She has been in a wilderness state even to this present hour^s, an object of hatred and derision to all that were round about her. Yet to the eye of faith she is most

^l Heb. xii. 22.

^k Rev. xxi. 10, 11, 14, 21.

^l Rev. xxi. 18.

^m Isai. lx. 19.

ⁿ Rev. xxi. 23.

^o Eph. iii. 14, 15.

^p Phil. iv. 4.

^q Rev. i. 5, 6.

^r Isai. liii. 2.

^s Rev. xii. 6.

beautiful, most glorious. In all that pertains to her, she is “the perfection of beauty^t.” Her foundations are of the most precious stones: “her walls are salvation, and her gates praise^u.” Her laws are all holy, and just, and good: her ordinances are a very heaven upon earth: and her members more highly privileged than all other creatures in the universe. Say then, Brethren, whether such be your views of Zion; and whether to be enrolled amongst her citizens be the highest object of your ambition? Our blessed Lord told his disciples, that even to have “the devils made subject unto them” was no ground of joy in comparison of this^x: for, if you really belong to Zion, “your names are written in heaven,” and all the glory and felicity of heaven are yours. But if you are “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, you are strangers from the covenants of promise, without God, without Christ, without hope^y.”]

2. We should seek to advance her glory—

[God has promised, that, in due season, “the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and that all nations shall flow unto her^z.” “Then shall Zion be no more termed desolate, or forsaken: for God will delight in her; and all the kings of the earth shall bring their glory to her.” “Her gates shall be open continually: they shall not be shut day nor night; that men may bring unto her the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought. Then the nation and kingdom which shall not serve her shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted. The glory of Lebanon shall come unto her, the fir-tree, the pine-tree, and the box together, (the meanest slave being as acceptable as the mightiest monarch,) to beautify the place of God’s sanctuary, and to make the place of his feet glorious. The sons also of them that afflicted her, shall come bending unto her; and all that despised her shall bow down themselves at the soles of her feet; and shall call her, The city of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel^a.” Now then I ask, Should we not long for this glorious period? Should we not exert ourselves to the uttermost to help it forward? Should we not search out the benighted Gentiles, and labour to bring back to their God the dispersed of Israel? Should we not endeavour to bring men from every quarter, “their sons in our arms, and their daughters in litters upon our shoulders, to glorify the house of his glory?” Men may pretend to love the Church: but their professions must be brought to this test. If we are at all sensible of the benefit of belonging to Zion, we shall neither rest ourselves, “nor give any rest to our God,” till

^t Ps. l. 2.

^u Isai. lx. 18.

^x Luke x. 20.

^y Eph. ii. 12.

^z Isai. ii. 2.

^a Isai. lx. 11—14.

“ the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth^b.”]

3. We should labour to participate in all her privileges—

[Is God indeed revealed there in all his excellency and glory? Is it the place, the only place, where sinners are born to God? Is it an emblem even of heaven itself? We should determine then to come to her without delay, and to seek admission into her blissful community. In comparison of being numbered amongst her children, all that the world can give should be esteemed by us as dung and dross; and we should say with David, “ I would rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness^c.” As for hatred, contempt, persecution, or even death itself, they should be accounted rather as an honour, and a happiness, and a privilege, than as objects of fear, if they are brought upon us for Zion’s sake. It should be a sufficient recompence to us, that our God is glorified, and that the interests of Zion are advanced^d. If we are children of Zion indeed, we shall be joyful under any circumstances; we shall “ be joyful, I say, in our King^e :” as it is written; “ They shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the Lord, for wheat, and for wine, and for oil, and for the young of the flock and of the herd; (that is, for all spiritual consolation and support;) and their soul shall be as a watered garden; and they shall not sorrow any more at all^f.” Whether they be priests or people, it shall be thus with them: for, “ I will satiate the soul of the priests with fatness; and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness, saith the Lord^g.”]

APPLICATION—

[Let us then love Zion, and “ prefer her before our chief joy^h.” Let her ordinances be our delightⁱ; and let us pray for her advancement, saying, “ Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within her palaces.” Then shall our own souls most assuredly flourish: for “ they shall prosper that love her^k.”]

^b Isai. lxii. 1, 6, 7.

^c Ps. lxxxiv. 10.

^d 1 Pet. iv. 13, 14.

^e Ps. cxlix. 2.

^f Jer. xxxi. 12.

^g Jer. xxxi. 14.

^h Ps. cxxxvii. 5, 6.

ⁱ Ps. lxxxiv. 4, 7.

^k Ps. cxxii. 6, 7.

DCXLVII.

DISTRESS OF SOUL CONSIDERED.

Ps. lxxxviii. 14—16. *Lord, why castest thou off my soul? why hidest thou thy face from me? I am afflicted, and ready to die, from my youth up: while I suffer thy terrors, I am distracted. Thy fierce wrath goeth over me; thy terrors have cut me off.*

HEMAN the Ezrahite, the author of this psalm, is thought by most to have been the grandson of Judah^a; and to have been so eminent for wisdom, as almost to have equalled Solomon himself^b. But he seems rather to have been the grandson of Shemuel, or Samuel^c. Whoever he was, he was a man greatly afflicted, and, at the time that he wrote this psalm, altogether destitute of any other consolation, than what he felt in spreading his sorrows before God. In other psalms we find many and grievous complaints; but the gloom that overspreads the mind of the author at the commencement of them, is usually dispelled before they are brought to a close; and what began with sorrow is terminated with joy. But in the composition before us there is no such pleasing change: it is nothing but one continued complaint from beginning to end. In discoursing on it, we shall point out,

I. The state to which a righteous soul may be reduced—

Truly the state of Heman was most afflictive—

[There can be no doubt but that he was a righteous man. Had he not been so, he would not have addressed Jehovah in such expressions of holy confidence, as “The Lord God of his salvation;” nor could he have affirmed, that “night and day he had poured out his prayers and cries before him^d.” Yet behold, how heavy, how exceeding heavy, was his affliction! “His soul was so full of troubles, that they brought him nigh to the grave^e.” Hear how he himself represents them, referring them all at the same time to God himself as the author of them: “Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. Thy wrath lieth hard upon me; and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves^f.” To the same effect he speaks also in the words of our text, complaining of the dereliction he experienced in this hour of his calamity, and of the terrors which he endured, which, whilst they were rapidly bringing down his body to the grave, had well nigh bereaved him of his senses, and reduced him to a state of utter distraction.]

And such, alas! is the state of many in every age of the Church—

^a 1 Chron. ii. 6.

^b 1 Kings iv. 31.

^c 1 Chron. vi. 33. and xv. 19. compared with the title to Ps. lxxxix. The grandson of Judah could not have written so about David.

^d ver. 1, 2, 9, 13.

^e ver. 3.

^f ver. 6, 7.

[Some there are of a low, nervous, hypochondriac temperament both of mind and body, and who, whether they were religious or not, would of necessity be of a melancholy disposition; that being their constitutional tendency, just as cheerfulness or confidence are the tendencies of others. Persons of this class view every thing in a dark unfavourable light: they forbode nothing but evil: and, if religion occupies their minds, they write bitter things against themselves, and conclude that they never can be saved. They love gloomy thoughts, and brood over them day and night; and greatly injure both their minds and bodies by ruminating on subjects that are too deep for them. They perplex themselves about the divine decrees, and thus give occasion to many to represent religion as distracting their minds. But the truth is, that they seek for nothing but poison: they have no appetite for wholesome food: and religion is no more answerable for their distraction, than a fertilizing stream is for the death of a maniac who drowns himself in it.

Some there are who are brought into this state by long and complicated troubles. The mind of man, unless supported in a miraculous way, cannot endure a pressure beyond certain limits. Even Job himself, notwithstanding his extraordinary patience, seemed at times to sink under the accumulated load of his afflictions, and to be transported beyond the bounds of sense or reason. And the dejection of many, however it appear to originate in matters connected with religion, must in reality be traced to this source: their mind is enfeebled by a complication of bodily diseases, and of worldly sorrows, and then becomes an easy prey to any discouragements which may engross its attention.

Some are broken down by means of some great transgression, which, either before, or after, their religious course, they have committed, and which has destroyed all hope of respect from man, or comfort in their own minds. To such, life is become a burthen: they cannot bear even the sight of those whose esteem they have forfeited: they affect solitude, which yet is irksome to them; and they long for death, as a relief from the torments of a self-condemning conscience. It is no wonder if such, though truly penitent before God, yield to desponding fears, and anticipate nothing but misery in the eternal world.

Some are in a more extraordinary degree than others exposed to the assaults of Satan. That powerful adversary seems, as it were, to take possession of their minds, as formerly he possessed the bodies of men: and by his fiery darts he inflicts the deadliest wounds upon their souls. He is well called, "The accuser of the brethren;" for he accuses them to God, as he did Job of old; and accuses them also at the bar of their own consciences, to prove them hypocrites and self-deceivers. Is it to be wondered at, if that roaring lion prevail over a weak

and unprotected sheep? The wonder rather is, that any are enabled to withstand him.

But once more: there are some who by God himself are brought into manifold temptations, and are suffered to experience much darkness in their souls. And though at first sight it should seem as if these persons were less beloved of the Lord than others, the truth is, that they are often to be found amongst those who are his chief favourites: "Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth;" and usually, those most, who are most beloved. We cannot doubt but that Job was an object of God's peculiar favour: yet who was ever more afflicted than he, even in the very way that we are now speaking of? Hear his own words: "The arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit: the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me^g." And need we say how deeply our blessed Lord himself was afflicted, when "his soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death," and his mind was so distracted, that "he knew not what to say^h?"

That God sends these dispensations to his people in love, will appear even from our text: for Heman, who was eminent for his piety, declares, that he had been so "afflicted from his youth up." And where did he attain this extraordinary piety, but in the school of affliction? Whilst others were intent on pleasure, he by his troubles was led to study his own heart, and to seek an acquaintance with his God; and thus he gained a knowledge which well repaid him for all that he endured. And it is a well-known fact, that those who are most exercised with spiritual troubles, are usually best instructed in "the deep things of God."

It is evident, then, that pious souls *may* be reduced to great distress, and that, in fact, many in every age *are* really so reduced; some through *constitutional infirmity*; some by means of *accumulated afflictions*; and some by an irretrievable loss of character consequent on some *heinous transgression*: some are brought into it by the *assaults of Satan*, and some by the wise and gracious *appointment of their God.*]

Let us now turn our attention to,

II. The reflections which naturally arise from the subject—

And,

1. How great is the evil and bitterness of sin—

[If there had been no sin, there would have been no sorrow. Sorrow is the fruit of sin; the fruit which immediately sprang up, as soon as this root of bitterness was planted in the human breast. Till Adam fell, he enjoyed the sweetest

^g Job vi. 4.

^h John xii. 27.

intercourse with his Creator : but, after his transgression, instead of going forth as before to meet his God, he fled from his face, and strove to hide himself. From that moment has the world become a “Bochim,” a land of weeping and of mourningⁱ. Sorrow is that inheritance to which every child of man is born : and, even if any be truly converted unto God, still, as long as they continue in this vale of tears, they will, at a greater or smaller distance, be followed by two inseparable attendants, “sorrow and sighing :” and it is only when they shall arrive at the portals of heaven, that joy and gladness will be their sole companions : then indeed, but never till then, will that Scripture be fulfilled, “They shall obtain joy and gladness ; and sorrow and sighing shall flee away^k.” How fearfully the minds even of good men may be oppressed, by a sense of God’s displeasure against sin, will appear from the experience of David ; who “ate ashes like bread, and mingled his drink with weeping, because of God’s indignation and wrath^l.” And it yet more forcibly appears from the complaints of Job : “Thou scarest me with dreams, and terrifiest me through visions : so that my soul chooseth strangling, and death rather than life^m.” If we look to the terrifying effects of sin on the ungodly, the sad history of Judas paints them in their true colours. Let these sorrows then, in whomsoever they be found, be traced to their proper source : and let this at least be learned from them, that “it is an evil and bitter thing to sin against the Lord.”]

2. What obligations to God do they lie under, who are favoured with any measure of peace and joy !

[This point, we apprehend, is by no means duly considered. It is thought by many to be a hard thing if there be any intermission of their spiritual comfort : but the wonder rather is, that there is any intermission of their sorrow. Who that considers the desert of sin, who that views the imperfection of his best services, has not reason to adore and magnify his God, for the willingness he shews to revive the hearts of the contrite ? Were God extreme to mark what is done amiss, the experience in our text would be the lot of all without exception, even of those who should find grace in the eternal world. But, blessed be God ! this is far from being the case : there are many to whom God vouchsafes the light of his countenance, and the joys of his salvation. We desire, however, that such persons should appreciate aright the blessings conferred upon them : and that, instead of ever complaining of darkness or of trouble, they should improve every manifestation of God’s love to the furtherance of their confidence in him, and of their zeal in his service.]

ⁱ Judg. ii. 4, 5.

^l See Ps. xxxviii. 1, 2. and cii. 9, 10.

^k Isai. xxxv. 10.

^m Job vii. 14, 15.

3. How astonishing was the compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ, when he undertook to redeem a ruined world!

[He well knew, that, as the surety and substitute of sinners, he must bear all that the violated law would have inflicted upon them. And, if to us, who are by nature alienated from God, it is such a dreadful thing to endure the hidings of his face and the terrors of his wrath, what must it be to that immaculate Lamb of God, who from all eternity “lay in the bosom of his Father,” and “was daily his delight!” Yet behold, having undertaken for us, he suffered all that was due to us, “He the just, for us the unjust!” From his youth up was he “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief:” and, especially at the close of his life, he drank to the very dregs the cup of bitterness that must otherwise have been put into our hands. Truly “he was made a curse for us:” and so grievously did he suffer under the united assaults of men and devils, and from a sense also of his Father’s wrath, that he sweat great drops of blood, and, in the midst of his severest agonies, had yet further to bewail the hidings of his Father’s face; “My God, my God! why hast thou forsaken me?” Let us learn to estimate as we ought this stupendous mystery, of “God manifest in the flesh” to expiate by his own sufferings the sins of his rebellious creatures. O let us contemplate this mystery, till we are altogether lost in wonder, love, and praise!]

4. How awful will be the state of all who die without an interest in Christ!

[This which Heman so bitterly bewails as his portion in this world, will, in an infinitely higher degree, be the portion of all who shall perish in their sins. They will indeed be “cast out from God’s sight,” as objects of his everlasting abhorrence. Never to all eternity will they have one look from him, but will behold “his face turned away” from them, and “his fierce wrath” executed upon them. Verily, “whilst they suffer his terrors, they will be distracted.” Who can conceive the distraction of their minds at the overwhelming thought of eternity? Oh! what “weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth” will there be amongst that wretched assembly, whose agonies are so insupportable, and whose prospects so interminable! But thus it must be, if we will not flee to that Saviour, who has laid down his life for us. Shall we not then awake from our slumbers? Shall we not cry unto our God, now that his ear is open to our petitions? Shall we stay till we come into that place of torment, and have an impassable gulf fixed between him and us? O let us “seek the Lord whilst he may be found,

ⁿ John i. 18. and Prov. viii. 30.

and call upon him whilst he is near:" then, though we should not enjoy all that we may wish for here, we shall hereafter; and even, by our occasional sorrows here, be fitted for an uninterrupted fruition of his glory to all eternity.]

DCXLVIII.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF GOD'S PEOPLE.

Ps. lxxxix. 15, 16. *Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance. In thy name shall they rejoice all the day: and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted.*

EVERY man by nature desires happiness: but few know where it is to be found. The generality imagine that it will be a sure attendant on earthly prosperity — — — But the Psalmist points out to us its only true source: "There be many that say, who will shew us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us^a." In like manner he instructs us in the text; "Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound."

In these words the character and blessedness of the Lord's people are fully declared. Let us consider,
I. Their character—

"The joyful sound" must here import the Gospel—

[In the Gospel a Saviour is revealed, even such a Saviour as our necessities require, a Saviour who has made a full atonement for our sins, and who promises "salvation to all who come unto God by him." When this Saviour was proclaimed to the shepherds, it was in these memorable terms; "Behold, we bring you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people: for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord!"

But "the joyful sound" refers to the sound of the trumpets under the law, when the people were convoked to come up to God in the solemn assembly^b, or when the year of Jubilee was proclaimed^c. On this latter occasion, in particular, it was indeed a joyful sound: for then all persons who had sold their houses and lands, yea, and their wives and children, and their own selves too for bond-slaves, were restored to perfect liberty, and to the full possession of their former inheritance — — — Suppose a person so circumstanced, what a joyful sound would that of the trumpet be to him! — — — Such then is the Gospel

^a Ps. iv. 6.

^b Numb. x. 1—3, 10.

^c Lev. xxv. 8—13.

to the weary and heavy-laden sinner, when he hears of a free and full salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ — — —]

This “sound” the true Believer “knows”—

[A *speculative* knowledge of the Gospel is possessed by many who have no personal interest in it, and no desire after its blessings: but the true Believer knows it *practically*: he has felt its power; he has tasted its sweetness: and he has been brought to a reliance on it for the salvation of his soul. This distinction must be carefully made by us. It is not of a *head-knowledge* that my text speaks; but of such a knowledge as enters into the *heart*, and engages all the powers of the soul — — — It is such a knowledge as God alone can impart — — — and all who possess *that* are truly “blessed.”]

In our text we have a rich description of,

II. Their blessedness—

They may not have much of this world: but they have much of God: they enjoy,

1. A sweet sense of his love—

[“They walk in the light of his countenance.” This is a privilege of which a worldly man can form no conception: but it is understood, and experienced, by all who enter into the spirit of the Gospel. They can go to God as a Father: they know that he is reconciled towards them in the Son of his love: and with a spirit of adoption they can draw nigh to him, and pour out their hearts before him, and hear him speaking peace unto their souls. In answer to their daily prayers he draws nigh to them, and “lifts up the light of his countenance upon them,” and “fills them with joy and peace in believing.” Such is their daily “walk” with God, a foretaste of their happiness in the realms of bliss.”]

2. An habitual confidence in his care—

[They are subjected to a variety of circumstances like other men: but they have a Friend to whom they can go on every occasion, and from whom they can receive all such communications as they stand in need of. “The name of the Lord is a strong tower, to which they run and are safe.” His perfections are all exercised in their behalf: and, being their God, he is “a God unto them,” doing for them whatsoever their diversified necessities require. In Him “therefore, even in his name, they rejoice all the day;” spreading before him their every want, and committing to him their every desire. “They know in whom they have believed,” and cast all their care on him who careth for them.”]

3. An assured prospect of his glory—

[In the Gospel the Lord Jesus Christ reveals himself to his people as a complete Saviour, who not only obtains a pardon for them, but has provided also a righteousness, wherein they may stand before God without spot or blemish. To him therefore they look in this view: and on him they rely, as "*The Lord their righteousness.*" "In this righteousness they are exalted:" they are exalted in their own eyes, being no longer condemned sinners, but saints accepted and justified from all their sins. They are exalted in the eyes of God also; for he now "beholds no iniquity in them:" he views them as one with his dear Son, partakers of his nature, and joint-heirs of his glory. They are exalted also in the eyes of all the angelic hosts, who now delight to minister unto them, and will ere long give them the precedence in heaven, and take their station behind them before the throne of God^d."

Say now, are not these happy? Yes: and David not only asserts it, but *appeals to God himself* for the truth of his assertion: "They shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance."

ADDRESS—

1. Those who have no knowledge of this joyful sound—

[How many amongst us are altogether ignorant of the Gospel itself! and, of those who hear it and profess to receive it, how many have no taste for that joy which it is intended to impart!——Will you then call yourselves the people of God; or imagine that salvation belongs to you? Know, that "all are not Israel, who are of Israel;" nor are all Christians who bear that name. Whilst you are ignorant of the joyful sound, you can have no part or lot in those blessings which the Gospel is intended to convey.]

2. Those who know the Gospel, but find no blessedness in it—

[There are, I must acknowledge, many of this description. But whence does this arise? Is it owing to any insufficiency in the Gospel to make them happy? No: it proceeds in some cases from a disordered constitution: in others, from imperfect views of the Gospel: and in others, from not walking steadfastly and consistently before God. But from whatever source it arise, I would say, Remember what an injury you do to the Gospel itself, and to the souls of men: the world around you will impute your gloom to religion, and take occasion from it to condemn the Gospel itself as a source of melancholy to all who embrace it. O! brethren, do not so dishonour the Lord Jesus Christ: but view the Gospel in all its freeness and all its

^d Rev. vii. 11.

fulness, and all its excellency; and rest not till you have attained those rich blessings, which every true Believer is privileged to enjoy.]

3. Those who both know and enjoy the Gospel—

[Happy indeed are ye, even though ye be in all other respects the most destitute and distressed. Let then your gratitude to God evince itself in a suitable life and conversation. As for your joys, the world knows nothing about them; and will therefore impute them to enthusiasm and delusion. But they can understand a holy life: *that* will approve itself to them as a good and genuine fruit of the Gospel. Let them then see, that this Gospel which makes you happy, makes you holy also. Let them see that it brings into subjection every unhallowed temper, every evil desire. Let them see that in every station and relation of life it elevates you above others, rendering you more amiable, more consistent. In a word, “let your whole conversation be such as becometh the Gospel of Christ;” and, whilst you are made partakers of a felicity which the world knows not of, endeavour to make your light shine before men, that they may be constrained to acknowledge the excellence of your principles, and be led to seek a participation of your bliss.]

DCXLIX.

THE SUFFICIENCY OF CHRIST TO SAVE.

Ps lxxxix. 19. *Thou spakest in vision to thy Holy One, and saidst, I have laid help upon one that is mighty.*

HOW joyful must these tidings be, to whomsoever they may have respect! Suppose them to refer to an oppressed nation; the raising up to them a mighty deliverer must be a rich, inestimable blessing: and such were David and Solomon, who were raised up to govern Israel, and to put all their enemies under their feet. But a greater than David or Solomon is here. The words spoken by God to Samuel did certainly, in their primary sense, relate to David^a; as those spoken afterwards to Nathan did to Solomon^b. But their ultimate reference was to Christ^c, who is the true David^d, and the Son of David^e. On him was

^a 1 Sam. xvi. 1.

^b 2 Sam. vii. 12—16.

^c Compare 2 Sam. vii. 14. with Heb. i. 5.

^d Ezek. xxxiv. 23, 24. and Hos. iii. 5.

^e Matt. xxii. 42.

laid all the help that the Israel of God required; and God the Father declared beforehand, to his holy prophets, the sufficiency of Christ to discharge the office committed to him.

Two things are here obviously presented to us for our consideration :

I. The office committed unto Christ—

What this was, may be known from the necessities of fallen man ; because it was to supply them that he was sent into the world. It was then,

1. To make reconciliation for man—

[This was a work which no man could accomplish for himself; a work which all the angels in heaven were unequal to perform. Satisfaction must be made for sin ; made too in the nature that had sinned. The curse due to sin must be borne, even the wrath of Almighty God. Who could afford us this help? who could sustain this weight? It would crush in an instant the highest archangel. None could endure it, but God's co-equal Son. He cheerfully undertaking to bear it for us, the Father made him our substitute; that, divine justice being satisfied, and the law magnified by his obedience unto death, mercy might be extended unto us, and reconciliation be made between God and his offending creatures.]

2. To effect their complete salvation—

[It was not enough to die for them: they were wandering afar off, and they must be searched out ; they were in rebellion, and must be subdued: when brought home to their Father's house, they are weak, and must be upheld; tempted, and must be strengthened; beset with enemies, and must be protected: they must never be left to themselves one moment: they must have every thing done for them, and in them: the whole care of preserving them, from first to last, must be devolved on him who undertakes for them: they must be "carried in the arms," "dandled on the knees," fed at the breast, and be watched over exactly like new-born infants. Nothing less than this will suffice for them. Though there be millions of them spread over the face of the whole globe, they must all be attended to as much as if there were only one. What a work was this to undertake! Yet was this "the help which God laid upon" his dear Son.]

But weighty as this office is, we have no reason to doubt,

II. His sufficiency to discharge it—

To be convinced of this, we need only to consider,

1. His essential perfections—

[He is said to be “mighty.” But the angels are also called *mighty*; yet are they not therefore able to execute such an office as this. But Jesus is *almighty*: he is expressly called “The mighty God^f,” even “God over all blessed for ever^g.” In him therefore are all the perfections of the Deity. He is omnipresent, to behold the states of men; omniscient, to discern the things that will be most expedient for their relief; and omnipotent, to effect whatever shall be most conducive to their good. Difficulties can be no difficulties with him. He who spake the universe into existence, can be at no loss to accomplish, every where, and at the same instant, whatsoever the necessities of his creatures may require.]

2. His Mediatorial endowments—

[As Mediator, he has received his qualifications from God the Father: and those qualifications are abundantly sufficient for the work assigned him. The Spirit has been given to him, not by measure, as to others, but without measure^h: “In him, even in his human nature, dwelleth all the fulness of the God-head bodilyⁱ.” Hence “on him may be hanged every vessel, even all the glory of his Father’s house^k.”

But, not to mention the infinite merit of his blood, and the all-prevailing efficacy of his intercession (“through which he is able to save men to the uttermost”), he has, *as man*, qualifications which he could not have *as God*. He has, from his own experience of temptation, a tender sympathy with his tempted people, and a peculiar fitness and readiness to afford them all needful succour^l.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who feel not their need of Christ—

[You cannot be persuaded that you are in a guilty, helpless, and undone state. But wherefore did God lay help upon One that was so mighty? Did he exert himself thus without a cause? If not, the greatness of the remedy should shew you the extent and imminence of your danger. Be persuaded then to put away your high thoughts of yourselves. Beg of God that you may feel in what a helpless and hopeless state you are without Christ: and never imagine that your repentance is at all genuine, till your sense of your misery corresponds, in some measure at least, with the provision which God has made for your relief.]

2. Those who are discouraged on account of their extreme weakness and sinfulness—

[That you should *be humbled* on this account is right

^f Isai. ix. 6.

^g Rom. ix. 5.

^h John iii. 34.

ⁱ Col. ii. 9.

^k Isai. xxii. 22—24.

^l Heb. ii. 18.

enough: but why should you *fear*? Do you suppose, that when God laid help for you upon his dear Son, he was not aware how much would be necessary for your salvation? or, has he been disappointed in his Son, finding him, after all, unequal to the task assigned him? Be ashamed of your unbelieving fears. Come not to Christ, saying, "Lord, if thou *canst*, or if thou *wilt*;" but cast your burthen wholly upon him, and see whether he be not able and willing to sustain you. He himself says to you, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thy help^m." This is your warrant to trust in him. "Trust in him therefore with all your heart, and he will bring to pass" whatsoever he sees to be needful for you. "Cast all your care upon him;" and you "shall be saved in him with an everlasting salvation."]

^m Hos. xiii. 9.

DCL.

GOD'S COVENANT ENGAGEMENTS WITH CHRIST AND US.

Ps. lxxxix. 28—35. *My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him. His seed also will I make to endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven. If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless, my loving kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once have I sworn by my holiness, that I will not lie unto David.*

IN seasons of deep affliction, when, through unbelief, we are ready to think that God has forsaken and forgotten us, it is well to look back to God's covenant engagements, whereon, as on a rock, we may stand firm amidst the tempest that surrounds us. It was under such circumstances (probably about the time of the Babylonish captivity) that this psalm was penned. In it the stability of God's covenant is fully declared. The fears and apprehensions of his people, as arising from his *apparent* violation of it, are next delineated: and it concludes with fervent adorations of God, who, notwithstanding all the dictates of unbelief, is worthy to be blessed for evermore.

For the just use, as well as understanding, of the passage before us, we shall,

I. Explain it—

[There can be no doubt but that the words, in their literal meaning, refer to the covenant which God made with David respecting the continuance of his posterity on his throne^a; and which seemed to be violated, now that both king and people were carried captive to Babylon; but which, in fact, should be accomplished in all its parts; because whatever they might endure for a season, the sceptre should not depart from Judah till Shiloh should come.

But there is doubtless a reference to Christ, who is often called David^b. Some of the words originally addressed to David, are expressly declared to refer to Christ chiefly, yea *exclusively*^c. They must be understood therefore as containing God's covenant with Christ.

In them we see, first, God's assurances *respecting Christ himself*, that notwithstanding all the troubles he should experience, he should be raised from the dead^d, and have all the kingdoms of the earth for his possession^e.

Next, Christ is assured *respecting his people*, who are his seed^f, that though through infirmity and temptation they may fall into sin, the Father will not utterly abandon them, or finally withdraw his love from them^g. He will not indeed leave them to continue in sin (for that would be incompatible with their salvation^h) but he will chastise them, till they repent and turn from all their transgressions, and thus will he secure them to Christ as his inheritanceⁱ.

The grounds of these assurances are, lastly, specified. These are God's *covenant*, and his *oath*. Having entered into covenant with his Son, he cannot disannul it. Yet, if he were to give up to final destruction any who were Christ's spiritual seed, this covenant would be broken; seeing that some who were given to Christ would perish, and Christ, as far as relates to them, would have died in vain. Moreover, in this, the oath, which (for our consolation) he swore to his Son, would be violated: but, having sworn by his holiness, which is the glory of all his perfections, he never can, nor ever will recede. On these grounds therefore the glory of Christ, and the salvation of his people are irrevocably secured.]

Lest however this consolatory passage should be abused, let us,

^a 2 Sam. vii. 12—17. ^b Ezek. xxxiv. 23, 24. Hos. iii. 5.

^c Compare 2 Sam. vii. 14. with Heb. i. 5.

^d Compare Isai. lv. 3. with Acts xiii. 34.

^e Luke i. 32, 33. Rev. xi. 15.

^f Isai. liii. 10. Ps. xxii. 30. 1 Pet. i. 23.

^g Isai. liv. 7—10. Jer. xxxii. 40.

^h Heb. xii. 14.

ⁱ John xvii. 11. 1 Pet. i. 5—7.

II. Improve it—

It evidently TEACHES us,

1. To cleave unto Christ with full purpose of heart—

[The covenant, whether made with David or with Abraham, was confirmed before of God in Christ^k. Every blessing of the covenant was made over to him as our head and representative, and must be received from him by faith^l. To him therefore must we look for pardon, stability, and everlasting salvation. As to him the promises were made^m, so in him alone are they yea, and Amenⁿ. Let it then be our great care to be found in him^o; and then we may rest assured that nothing shall ever separate us from him^p.]

2. To endure with patience and thankfulness whatever afflictions God may lay upon us—

[Part of God's covenant is, to “correct us in measure^q.” And, however afflicted any may be, have they any cause to say, that they are corrected beyond measure? Can a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins^r? Surely it is far better to be chastened here, than to be condemned with the world hereafter^s. We may all see reason enough for chastisement, if we will but mark our daily and hourly transgressions. Let us therefore not so much as desire God to spare us, provided he see that we need correction for the welfare of our souls; but rather let us kiss the rod^t, and improve it^u, and adore the hand that uses it for our good^x.]

3. To dread sin as the greatest of all evils—

[Though at first sight this passage may seem to weaken our dread of sin, yet, in reality, it is calculated to impress us with a holy fear of offending God. The covenant made with Christ does indeed secure the salvation of his people: but does it provide them impunity in sin? No—on the contrary, it engages God to punish sin, yea, to punish it effectually; and never to leave his people under its dominion^y. Is there then room to say, I shall be saved, though I commit sin? No: for either God will “drive it out with the rod of correction,” or leave it as an indisputable mark that we never belonged to him at all^z. Let us never then make Christ a minister of sin^a; but learn from the very grace that saves us, to glorify him by a holy conversation^b.]

^k Gal. iii. 17.

^l Col. i. 19. John i. 16. ^m Gal. iii. 16.

ⁿ 2 Cor. i. 20.

^o Phil. iii. 9.

^p Rom. viii. 38, 39.

^q Jer. xxx. 11.

^r Lam. iii. 39.

^s 1 Cor. xi. 32.

^t Mic. vi. 9.

^u Isai. xxvii. 9.

^x Heb. xii. 10.

^y Rom. vi. 14.

^z 1 John iii. 9, 10.

^a Gal. ii. 17.

^b Tit. ii. 11, 12.

DCLI.

GOD'S ANGER A REASON FOR TURNING TO HIM.

Ps. xc. 11, 12. *Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath. So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.*

THIS psalm is entitled, "A prayer of Moses the man of God." It seems to have been written by Moses on account of the judgment denounced against the whole nation of Israel, that they should die in the wilderness^a. It had been already executed to a great extent, God having consumed multitudes of them in his anger^b: and the period of man's life was then reduced to its present standard of seventy or eighty years^c. From this awful demonstration of God's displeasure, he is led to this reflection: "Who knoweth the power of thine anger?" And then he prays, that the whole nation might be induced by the shortness and uncertainty of their lives to seek without delay the favour of their offended God: "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

In accordance with our text let us also contemplate,
I. The inconceivable weight of God's anger—

Of course, in speaking of God's anger we must divest it of all those tumultuous feelings, which agitate the minds of men; and conceive of it as manifested only in his dispensations towards the objects of his displeasure.

Let us contemplate it then,

1. As it appears in this world—

[The whole world bears the evidence of being under the displeasure of an angry God. The creation itself, even the animal and vegetable, as well as the rational parts of it, is greatly changed since it came out of its Creator's hands. A curse has been inflicted on it all, on account of sin. Storms, and tempests, and earthquakes, and pestilences, and diseases of every kind, and death with its antecedent pains and its attendant horrors, are all the sad fruits of sin, and the effects of God's anger on account of sin. Death has obtained an universal

^a ver. 3.

^b ver. 5—7.

^c ver. 10.

empire, and "reigns even over those who have never sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression," as well as over the actual transgressors of God's law.

But the anger of God is yet more strikingly visible, in those particular judgments which God has executed upon men from time to time. Behold the plagues in Egypt, the destruction of the Egyptian first-born, and of Pharaoh and all his host in the Red Sea! behold the awful judgments inflicted on Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and on the myriads, who, by their lewdness, their unbelief, and their murmurings, drew down the wrath of God upon them^d! behold fire and brimstone rained down from heaven upon Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities of the plain! yea, and the whole world, with every living creature except those contained in the ark, swept away by one universal deluge!—these serve as awful proofs of God's indignation against sin, and his determination to punish it according to its deserts.

There are other proofs, less visible indeed, but not less real, of God's anger, which may be found in the horrors of a guilty conscience, or the distresses of a soul that is under the hidings of his face. Hear what was Job's experience under a sense of God's displeasure: "The arrows of the Almighty are within me; the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit: the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me^e." To the same effect the Psalmist also speaks, when describing the anguish of his own mind: "Thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore. There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin. I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day. I am feeble and sore broken; I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart^f." The unhappy end of Judas shews how insupportable is a sense of God's wrath, when the consolations of hope are altogether withdrawn.

But, after all, there is nothing that will give us such an idea of God's anger, as a view of the Lord Jesus Christ when "Jehovah's sword awoke against him" to inflict the penalty that was due to sin. Behold that immaculate Lamb of God sweating great drops of blood from every pore of his body, through the inconceivable agonies of his soul! Hear him, in the depths of dereliction, crying, "My God, my God! why hast thou forsaken me?" and see him, finally, giving up the ghost, and dying under the load of his people's sins! Could we at all appreciate this mystery, we should indeed say, "Who knoweth the power of thine anger?"

But let us contemplate it,]

2. As it appears in the world to come—

^d 1 Cor. x. 8—10. ^e Job vi. 4. ^f Ps. xxxviii. 2, 3, 6, 8.

[Of this however we can form but little conception. The terms which are used to depict the misery of the fallen angels, and of those who from amongst the human race have died in their sins, though exceeding terrible to the imagination, fall infinitely short of the reality. But the very circumstance of millions of once happy angels, as happy as any that are now before the throne of God, being cast out of heaven for their pride; and hell itself being prepared by Almighty God for their reception, that they may there endure his wrath and indignation to the uttermost—this very circumstance, I say, may serve to shew, how deeply God abhors iniquity, and how fearfully he will punish it. Of the place where they are confined “in chains of darkness to the judgment of the great day,” Tophet, as described by the Prophet Isaiah, may be considered as a type or emblem: “It is a place both deep and large: the pile thereof is fire and much wood: and the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it^s.” And the state of the unhappy sufferers there is thus described in the Revelation of St. John: “They drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation: and they are tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night^h.” Yet, terrible as this description is, it conveys no adequate idea either of the torment itself, or even of those foretastes of it, which are sometimes given to those for whom it is prepared. Well therefore may it be asked, “Who knoweth the power of thine anger?” and well is it added, “According to thy fear,” that is, according to the terror which the very apprehension of it excites, “so is thy wrath:” for, in truth, it not only equals, but infinitely exceeds, all the conceptions that can be formed of it.]

The whole scope both of the preceding and following context leads us to consider,

II. The wisdom of seeking reconciliation with him without delay—

Notwithstanding his anger against sin, God is willing to be reconciled to his offending people—

[“He will not always chide; neither will he keep his anger for ever.” “Many times did he turn away his wrath from his people in the wilderness; and did not suffer his whole displeasure to arise.” He has even sent his own Son into the world to effect reconciliation by the blood of his cross. He could not consistently with his own honour pardon sin without an atonement made for it: and, that a sufficient atonement

^s Isai. xxx. 33.

^h Rev. xiv. 10, 11.

might be made, he gave his Son to "bear our iniquities in his own body on the tree," and to "be made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." For the fallen angels he made no such provision: but for us he did: and he sends forth his servants into all the world, to proclaim his offers of mercy, and to "beseech sinners in his name to be reconciled to him" — — —]

To seek reconciliation with him then is our true wisdom—

[The world may account it folly, and may stigmatize all serious piety as needless preciseness: but we hesitate not to declare with David, that "the fear of the Lord is the very beginning of wisdomⁱ;" and that the prodigal's return to his father's house was an evidence, not, as his ungodly companions would say, of weakness and folly, but of his having attained a soundness of mind and judgment: for it was "*when he came to himself* he said, I will return, and go to my father." Who that reflects upon the inconceivable weight of God's anger, and on the misery of those who are exposed to it, would continue one moment obnoxious to it, when God is offering him pardon, and beseeching him to accept of all spiritual and eternal blessings? — — —

But add to this the shortness and uncertainty of human life. Who that considers *this*, would delay to deprecate God's wrath, and to avail himself of the present hour to secure the proffered mercy? O beg of God to impress your minds with a sense of the shortness of time, and to "teach you so to number your days, that you may without delay apply your hearts unto wisdom." Obvious as this lesson is, you can never learn it, unless you are taught of God. You will be ever calculating upon months and years to come, when "you know not what a single day may bring forth." You may even, like the Rich Fool, be promising yourselves "years of ease and pleasure," when God may have said, "This night shall thy soul be required of thee^k." To turn unto God *instantly* is true wisdom: to put it off to a more convenient season is folly and madness — — — "To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts^l!"]

But, to this work you must "apply with your heart," your whole heart—

[It is not by *seeking* merely, but by "*striving*, to enter in at the strait gate," that you are to obtain acceptance with your God^m. You must "*apply your heart*" unto wisdom: and "whatsoever your hand findeth to do, you must do it with all your mightⁿ" — — —]

ⁱ Ps. cxi. 10. ^k Luke xii. 19, 20. ^l Ps. cxix. 60. Heb. iii. 7, 8.

^m Luke xiii. 24.

ⁿ Eccl. ix. 10.

ADDRESS—

1. Those who make light of God's wrath—

[There are, alas ! too many who do this. "The wicked," as David says, "through the pride of his countenance will not seek after God : God is not in all his thoughts. His ways are always grievous : thy judgments are far above out of his sight : and as for all his enemies, *he puffeth at them*^o;" and, with atheistical impiety, "says in his heart, God will not do good ; neither will he do evil^p." But consider, brethren, whether you will think so lightly of God's judgments when you shall have begun to feel the weight of them? Think whether, on first opening your eyes in the invisible world, and beholding the face of your incensed God, you will not bewail your present supineness, and curse the day when you listened to the dictates of flesh and blood, instead of attending to the counsels of true wisdom? O! think, "Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger^q?" "Who can dwell with everlasting burnings^r?" I pray you to number your days, not as the world does, but as God directs you : and to consider every day as if it were to be your last. *This*, with God's blessing, will stir you up to redeem the present time, and will put energy into your exertions in "fleeing from the wrath to come." Whatever be your age, my advice is still the same : for "you know not whether your Lord will come in the evening, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning." "Knowing the terrors of the Lord, I would persuade you^s;" and "what I say unto one, I say unto all, Watch."]

2. Those who are in a state of reconciliation with him—

[Doubtless there are many amongst you, who can say with the church of old, "Though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortest me^t." To you then I would say, "Who knoweth the power of God's love? According to your hope, even your most sanguine hope, so is his mercy;" yes, and infinitely above all that either men or angels can conceive. Compare your state with that of those who are now lifting up their eyes in the torments of hell; and say whether eternity itself will suffice, to express your obligations to Him who has redeemed you by his blood, and to the Father who has accepted that atonement in your behalf? O! bless without ceasing your reconciled God. Labour to count, if it were possible, the riches of his grace; and to explore "the

^o Ps. x. 4, 5.^p Zeph. i. 12.^q Nah. i. 6.^r Isai. xxxiii. 14.^s 2 Cor. v. 11.^t Isai. xii. 1.

height and depth and length and breadth of his incomprehensible love." And let the stupendous mercy vouchsafed unto you, quicken you to every possible expression of gratitude to your adorable Benefactor.]

DCLII.

SATISFACTION IN GOD ALONE.

Ps. xc. 14. *O satisfy us early with thy mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days!*

WE are told, on most unquestionable authority, that "godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come^a." We are further assured, that "its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace^b." This was the conviction of Moses, when he penned this psalm. The vanity and bitterness of sin had been deeply felt by all that generation whom he had brought out of Egypt: and here, he declared that there was no happiness but in God: he prays, "O satisfy us early with thy mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days!" Now, Brethren, longing as I do for the happiness of you all, both here and in the eternal world, I will shew,

I. Where, and where alone, true satisfaction can be found—

The whole world are inquiring, "Who will shew us any good?" And to that there is but one answer to be given; namely this: "Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us^c!"

Satisfaction is not to be found in any earthly pursuit—

[Pleasure, how diversified soever it may be, can never satisfy a rational being. Solomon drank more deeply of that cup than any other man; and, after all, pronounced it to be "vanity and vexation of spirit." The same may be said of wealth and honour: they can never fill the desires and capacities of an immortal soul. As the eye is never satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing, so no man that attains the greatest eminence can be sure that he has reached the highest pinnacle of his ambition. Let him possess all that mortal man can possess, and there will be some Naboth, whose vineyard

^a 1 Tim. iv. 8.

^b Prov. iii. 17.

^c Ps. iv. 6.

he covets; or some Mordecai, who wounds him by refusing to pay him the homage he demands — — —]

Nor is it to be found in any religious services which are performed with a self-righteous view—

[Doubtless a self-righteous man may be gratified for a season with the notion that he has established a ground of confidence before God: but at times there will arise in his mind such thoughts as these: “Have I done enough to secure for me the forgiveness of my sins, and to purchase moreover the blessedness of heaven?” And, after all his labour, he will feel some secret misgivings that all is not right. He has not a standard whereby to measure his attainments, except indeed the holy Law of God: and *that* altogether condemns him. In this state of uncertainty he cannot contemplate death and judgment without a degree of alarm, which casts a gloom over his prospect of the eternal world, and to a certain degree embitters also his enjoyments in this present world.]

That which alone can afford solid satisfaction to the soul, is, the having obtained “mercy” of the Lord—

[Every man is conscious that he has sinned, and must give an account of himself to the Judge of quick and dead. But, if he have fled for refuge to Christ, and embraced the salvation offered him in the Gospel, he is ready to go into the presence of his God. He knows “in whom he has believed^d,” and has no doubt but that through the Redeemer’s righteousness he shall find acceptance with God. He will be able to say, “I know that when the earthly house of this tabernacle shall be dissolved, I have an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens^e.” In Christ he sees all that he can need: and, being “in Christ,” he is assured that “there is no condemnation to him^f” either now or at the bar of judgment. “Believing in Christ, he has peace with God,” and rejoices before him “with joy unspeakable and glorified^g.”]

This point being ascertained, let us direct our attention to,

II. The blessedness of those who seek it there—

Mercy, once obtained from the Lord, is the richest balm of life—

1. It constitutes the chief felicity in youth—

[Who is there that has sought the Lord in early life, and did not experience the benefit of that blessed employment beyond his most sanguine expectations? Nay, I will ask, Who ever spent one hour in penitential exercises, and in crying to

^d 2 Tim. i. 12. ^e 2 Cor. v. 1. ^f Rom. viii. 1. ^g 1 Pet. i. 8.

the Lord for mercy, and did not find more satisfaction in that hour than in all the pleasures he ever enjoyed? Who does not look back to such a period, as the happiest hour of his life? I will gladly concede to every man the liberty of passing judgment on himself; and will venture to abide the verdict which every man shall give. Into whatever state of carnal pleasures such an one may have turned aside, I can have no doubt but that, in seasons of reflection, he says, "Oh that it were with me as in times past!" — — —]

2. It renders us happy amidst all the most afflictive circumstances of life—

[Every man is, sooner or later, brought into trouble: for "man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward." But a sense of God's pardoning love upon his soul will more than counterbalance all his afflictions. "Being justified by faith, and having peace with God, he will glory in tribulations," of whatever kind they be^h. He will see his trials to be a rod in his Father's handⁱ; and he will acquiesce in the dispensation, from the hope that "all things shall work together for his good^k," and shall ultimately "work out for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory^l." — — —]

3. It administers consolation to him, even on the bed of death—

[How blessed were the reflections of St. Paul when in the daily expectation of a cruel death! "I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me in that day^m." Such was Jacob's consolation in his dying hour: "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lordⁿ." Yes, Brethren, a sense of God's pardoning mercy upon the soul will take away the sting of death, and make us rather to "desire that we may depart and be with Christ^o," in the full fruition of his glory.— — —]

ADDRESS—

1. The young—

[It is never too "early" to seek, and to obtain, "mercy" from God. We read of several who from their very infancy were sanctified unto the Lord: and why should not you be numbered amongst that highly-privileged class? You have an idea that the good things of this world, and the enjoyment of all pleasurable amusements, will make you happy. But if you will transfer this notion to spiritual things, and seek your happiness in them, I pledge myself that ye shall be satisfied

^h Rom. v. 1, 3. ⁱ Mic. vi. 9. ^k Rom. viii. 28. ^l 2 Cor. iv. 17.
^m 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8. ⁿ Gen. xlix. 18. ^o Phil. i. 23.

to the full: for of all the ransomed of the Lord it is said, "They shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the Lord, for wheat, and for wine, and for oil, and for the young of the flock and of the herd; and their soul shall be as a watered garden; and they shall not sorrow any more at all. Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, both young men and old together: for I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow. And I will satiate the soul of the priests with fatness; and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness, saith the Lord^p." Indeed, *you* have a promise peculiar to yourselves: for God has said, "They that seek me *early*, shall find me^q."]]

2. The busy—

[I would not have any one neglect his proper occupation in life. We are as much bound to be "diligent in business," as we are to be "fervent in spirit:" in the one, as well as in the other, we may "serve the Lord^r." But, *in comparison*, our zeal in the service of God should swallow up that which we exercise in reference to the world. Our Lord says, "Labour not for the meat that perisheth, but for that which endureth unto everlasting life^s." I will suppose that you succeed to the utmost extent of your wishes in this world, what satisfaction will it afford you in the eternal world, if you have not secured "an inheritance amongst the saints in light?" There is no occupation whatever that can justify a neglect of your eternal interests. There may be other things *desirable*; but this is *needful*, yea, "the one thing needful;" and therefore I say, "Seek *first* the kingdom of God and his righteousness," and leave it to God to "add other things to you" in the measure which in his unerring wisdom he shall see fit^t.]

3. Those advanced in life—

[Our text has a peculiar force as it relates to you. Much of your time is gone: and what is done either by you or for you, must be done quickly. There is, indeed, no time to be lost. The work of the soul is not to be left to a dying hour. Verily, that is but an unfavourable season for such a work; and the reality of it, when commenced at that season, is always dubious. Be in earnest now. Delay not another hour. Cry mightily to God, "O satisfy me early with thy mercy!" "Blot out my transgressions as a morning cloud:" wash them away in my Redeemer's blood. "Bring me out of the horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon the rock, and establish my goings; and put a new song into my mouth, even praise unto my God^u." "Then will I bless thee while I live:

^p Jer. xxxi. 12—14.

^q Prov. viii. 17.

^r Rom. xii. 11.

^s John vi. 27.

^t Matt. vi. 33.

^u Ps. xl. 2, 3.

I will lift up my hands in thy name: my soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips, when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate upon thee in the night-watches^x." "Yea, when my flesh and my heart fail, thou shalt be the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever."]

^x Ps. lxiii. 4.

DCLIII.

THE BEAUTY OF JEHOVAH IMPARTED TO HIS PEOPLE.

Ps. xc. 17. *Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us!*

IT is pleasing to think that in every age the Lord has many "hidden ones:" even as in the days of Elijah, who thought himself the only worshipper of Jehovah, whilst there were in reality "seven thousand men who had not bowed their knee to the image of Baal." It is not every one who dies apparently under the displeasure of God, that will be visited with his judgments in the world to come. Many "are judged of the Lord now, in order that they may not be condemned with the world hereafter^a." Amongst those who died in the wilderness for their transgressions, we know, infallibly, that some were received to mercy. We have no more doubt of the salvation of Moses and Aaron than we have of any saint from the foundation of the world. And we think that there is evidence in the psalm before us, that many repented in the wilderness, and that though "they were delivered, as it were, to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, their spirit will be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus^b." When they found that the sentence passed against them could not be reversed, they humbled themselves before God for their iniquities; and in consequence thereof they found favour in his sight, passing their remaining days upon earth in some measure of peace, and enjoying a hope, that, though they were never to possess the earthly Canaan, they should be admitted to the enjoyment of a heavenly inheritance. Their supplications for mercy were such

^a 1 Cor. xi. 32.

^b 1 Cor. v. 5.

as God never did, nor ever will, reject. “O satisfy us early with thy mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days! Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil. Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children: and let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us:” that is, Let us have such tokens of thy love, and such communications of thy grace, as may carry us forward with comfort, and prepare us for thy more immediate presence.

For the further elucidation of my text, I will endeavour to shew,

I. Wherein the beauty of the Lord our God consists—

But in attempting to speak on such a subject, I feel that I shall only “darken counsel by words without knowledge:” for “we cannot by searching find out God, we cannot find out the Almighty to perfection.” Yet, as we are able, we must declare him unto you, and set forth his perfections,

1. As existing in himself—

[We need only open our eyes and survey the visible creation, to be assured of his eternal power and godhead. In this respect the most stupid heathens, in neglecting to worship him, are without excuse. The magnitude and number of the heavenly bodies, all moving so exactly in their respective courses, and fulfilling the ends for which they were designed; and the variety and beauty of the things existing on this terraqueous globe, all so adapted for their respective offices and uses, and all subservient to one great design, the glory of their Creator; evince that his wisdom and goodness are equal to his power. I am not aware that philosophers have any advantage over those of less intelligence in things which are known only by revelation: because those things can be known only by the teachings of God’s Spirit; and the Holy Spirit can instruct one as easily as another, and does often “reveal to babes what is hid from the wise and prudent:” but in the things which are obvious to our senses they have a great advantage, because by their proficiency in different sciences they attain a comprehensive knowledge of many things, of which the generality of persons have no conception; and consequently, they can discern traces of divine wisdom, and goodness, and power, which can never come under the view of one that is illiterate and uninformed.]

If from the works of creation we turn our eyes to the dispensations of Providence, we shall see all the same perfections

illustrated and displayed to yet greater advantage ; because they shew how entirely every created being, however unconscious, or however adverse, fulfils his will, and executes his designs— — —

But it is in the work of redemption that the perfections of God must be chiefly viewed ; because in that are displayed his justice, his mercy, and his grace : for the exercise of which there is, in the works of creation and of providence, comparatively but little scope.

But, to discover these, we must view them,]

As displayed in the person of his Son—

[The Lord Jesus Christ is called “the image of the invisible God^c,” because in him Jehovah, “who dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen or can see^d,” is rendered visible to mortal eyes ; so that in him we see “the brightness of his Father’s glory, and the express image of his person^e.” We know that “in his face all the glory of the Godhead shines ;” and that on that account the god of this world is so anxious to blind our eyes, and to hide him from our view^f. See then in him, and in his cross, not some perfections only, but all, even all the perfections of the Godhead shining in their utmost splendour. Draw nigh to the garden of Gethsemane, or to Mount Calvary, and there take a view of your adorable Saviour. How awful does the justice of the Deity appear, when not one sinner in the universe could be received to mercy, nor one single transgression of God’s law be pardoned, till an atonement should be offered for it, not by any creature, but by the Creator himself, whose blood alone could expiate our guilt, and whose righteousness alone could serve as a sufficient title for our acceptance before God. And how bright does mercy appear, in that, rather than man should perish after the example of the fallen angels, God vouchsafed to give his only dear Son to die for us, and to effect our reconciliation by the blood of his cross ! What wisdom too is displayed in this way of making the truth of God, which denounced death as the penalty of sin, to consist with the happiness and salvation of those who had committed it ! as the Psalmist says, “Mercy and truth are met together ; righteousness and peace have kissed each other^g.” To make these perfections unite in the salvation of men, and to bring to every perfection far higher glory than it could have had if it had stood alone ; (for whilst each shines in its own proper glory, each has a tenfold lustre reflected on it by the opposite perfection with which it is made to harmonize ;) *this* required the utmost possible effort both of wisdom and grace ; and to all eternity will it form the chief subject of adoration and praise amongst all the hosts of heaven. Here is God seen as “forgiving

^c Col. i. 15.

^d 1 Tim. vi. 16.

^e Heb. i. 3.

^f 2 Cor. iv. 4.

^g Ps. lxxxv. 10.

iniquity, transgression, and sin, whilst he by no means clears the guilty^h;" because their guilt has been expiated, and a righteousness has been wrought out by the Lord Jesus Christ, so that God is "a just God, and yet a Saviourⁱ," and is no less just than he is merciful, in every exercise of his pardoning love, and in every blessing which he bestows on his redeemed people^k.]

The petition offered respecting this, leads us to inquire,

II. In what respects we may hope that "this beauty shall be on us"—

Had the prayer been offered by Moses alone, like that, "I beseech thee, shew me thy glory^l," we might have supposed, that it was a peculiar favour, which other saints had no right to expect. But the prayer was uttered by multitudes, even by the great mass of those who repented in the wilderness: and therefore it may be poured forth by all true penitents amongst ourselves, who may expect that "the beauty of the Lord shall be upon them:"

1. By an outward manifestation of it to our minds—

[To the Corinthian Church was this honour vouchsafed: for "God, who commanded light to shine out of darkness at the first Creation, shined into their hearts, to give them the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ^m." Such manifestations therefore may we also expect. The Lord Jesus Christ has expressly promised, that he will manifest himself to us, as he does not unto the world: and with such convincing evidence will he shew us his glory, that we shall differ from those around us, as Paul at his conversion differed from his attendants: they heard a voice as well as he; but he alone was favoured with the sight of the Lord Jesus Christ himselfⁿ: so that the words which we hear or read may be heard or read by thousands; but to us only, that is, to those only who are truly penitent and believing, will he "manifest forth his glory," so as to constrain us to cry out, "How great is his goodness! how great is his beauty^o!"

It is by the public ordinances chiefly that he will make these revelations of himself to us: and hence it was that David so exceedingly delighted in the house of God, saying, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, which I will seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, *to behold*

^h Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.

ⁱ Isai. xlv. 21.

^k 1 John i. 9.

^l Exod. xxxiii. 18.

^m 2 Cor. iv. 6.

ⁿ Acts ix. 7. 1 Cor. ix. 1. and xv. 8.

^o Zech. ix. 17.

the fair beauty of the Lord^v." If only we come up to his house with raised expectations, and a humble mind, he will reveal himself to us, and lift up the light of his countenance upon us, and shew us "his power and glory so as he is accustomed to display them in his sanctuary^q."]]

2. By an inward communication of it to our souls—

[“God originally made man after his own image^r,” and after the same image will he create us anew “in righteousness and true holiness^s.” It is for this very end that he so reveals himself in his ordinances; namely, that, by communing with him there, our faces may be made to shine, as the face of Moses did^t; and that “by beholding his glory we may be changed into the same image from glory to glory by the Spirit of our God^u.” In this sense the beauty of the Lord our God shall be upon all his children, according as it is written, “He that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself even as he is pure^x.” No inferior standard will they aim at: they know their duty; and they know their privilege: and with no attainments will they be satisfied, till they “are holy, as God is holy;” and “perfect, even as their Father that is in heaven is perfect.”

This indeed will not be imparted to any one at once: it is a progressive work: persons must be babes, and young men, before they are fathers: but from the time that they are truly converted unto God, they will “grow in grace,” and “make their profiting to appear,” till they have “attained to the full measure of the stature of Christ^y.” To all of you then I would say, Offer up with devoutest earnestness to God the petition in my text, “Let THE BEAUTY OF THE LORD our God be upon us:” and add to it that prayer of Paul for the Ephesian converts, which in import corresponds exactly with it; “Let me so comprehend the love of Christ, as to be filled by it with all THE FULNESS OF GOD.”]

From the text thus explained, we may LEARN,

1. What is the great antidote to the troubles of life?

[Certainly the Israelites, when doomed to perish in the wilderness, were in a very pitiable condition. But, if they could only attain this great object, they declared that their sorrows would all be turned into joy^z. So whatever our troubles be, their sting will be altogether taken away, if they prevail to bring us to the footstool of our God, and to the enjoyment of the light of his countenance. The trials which God sends are for this very end; to purge away our dross, and

p Ps. xxvii. 4.

q Ps. lxiii. 2.

r Gen. i. 26, 27.

s Eph. iv. 24.

t Exod. xxxiv. 29, 30.

u 2 Cor. iii. 18.

x 1 John iii. 3.

y Eph. iv. 13.

z Eph. iii. 18, 19

to purify us as gold, that we may be vessels of honour, meet for our Master's use. Let us then not be so anxious to get rid of our afflictions, as to obtain from God a sanctified use of them, in *brighter manifestations of him*, and *richer communications from him*, and *a more entire conformity to him*^a. Let us but get even a small measure of these benefits, and "our consolations shall abound far above all that our afflictions have abounded"^b———]

2. What we are to aim at, in our pursuit of holiness—

[It is not any one grace, or any particular set of graces, that we should seek after, but an entire conformity to the image of our God. Now his beauty, as we have seen, consists not in any one perfection, but in an union of all perfections, however opposite to each other. So must there be in us, not such graces only as are suited to the natural temperament of our minds, but an assemblage of all graces, however different from each other; every one being blended with, and tempered by, its opposite, and all together brought, as occasion may require, into united exercise. God is compared to "light;" which is an union of rays, exceedingly diverse from each other, and all in simultaneous motion. Now as some may think that the brighter coloured rays, as the red, the orange, the yellow, would make a better light if divested of those which bear a more sombre aspect, as the blue, the indigo, and the violet; so many imagine, that God would be more lovely, if justice were separated from his attributes, and mercy were to shine unalloyed by that more formidable perfection. But as neither can light part with any of its rays, nor, God with any of his perfections, so neither must the Christian dispense with any grace whatever: if he rejoice, it must be with trembling: if he walk in faith, he must be also in the fear of the Lord all the day long. If he be bold, he must also be meek and lowly of heart, and resemble him, who "was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so opened not he his mouth." This union of opposite graces it is which constitutes the beauty of holiness: as David, after the most exalted strains of adoration, says, "O worship the Lord in *the beauty of holiness: fear before him* all the earth"^c."

Let me earnestly entreat the professors of religion to be attentive to this matter. Nothing is more common than for persons of this description to value themselves on account of some particular grace or set of graces, when they are offensive, and, I had almost said, odious in the eyes both of God and man, for want of those graces which ought to temper, and to moderate the actings of their mind. Distortion in the human frame is not more disgusting than such distorted piety as this. Even without any particular blemish in the human frame, it is

^a ver. 15.

^b 2 Cor. i. 5.

^c Ps. xevi. 7—9.

not any one feature that constitutes beauty ; but a regular and harmonious set of features : so it is not faith, or fear, or zeal, or prudence, or any other separate grace, that will assimilate us to the Deity, but every grace in its proper measure, and its combined exercise ; or rather every grace borrowing from its opposite its chief lustre, and all harmoniously exercised for the glory of God.

Were this subject better understood, we should see, as in Christ, so in all his followers also, the God and the man, the lion and the lamb.]

DCLIV.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF GOD'S PEOPLE.

Ps. xci. 1—4. *He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress : my God ; in him will I trust. Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust : his truth shall be thy shield and buckler.*

TO unfold the doctrines and duties of our holy religion is a matter of indispensable necessity to every one who would discharge the ministerial office with acceptance. Yet it is not necessary that a minister should always be laying the foundation of repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ : there are times and seasons when he should “ go on unto perfection^a,” and exhibit Christianity in its highest stages of practical efficiency. The psalm before us will afford us ample scope for this. The words which we have just read are somewhat disconnected : but a slight alteration in the translation, whilst it will not affect the sense of the passage, will cast a light and beauty over it, and render it doubly interesting to us all. Two prelates of our Church agree in reading the passage thus : “ He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, *that abideth* under the shadow of the Almighty ; *that saith* of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress ; my God, in *whom* I will trust.” Then the Psalmist, instead of proceeding regularly with his speech, breaks off, and

^a Heb. vi. 1.

in an apostrophe addresses the person whom he has been describing; “Surely he shall deliver *thee*^b,” &c. &c. According to this rendering, we have a clear exposition of the character and blessedness of every true believer. Let us consider, then,

I. His character—

He is not described either by his religious creed or by his moral conduct. We are led to view him rather in his secret walk with God: and in this view his character is portrayed,

1. Figuratively—

[It will be remembered that God dwelt by a visible symbol of his presence in the tabernacle; and that the high-priest on the great day of annual atonement went within the veil, and abode there till he had sprinkled the blood of his sacrifices upon the mercy-seat, and covered the mercy-seat with his incense. Now, what he did *corporeally* once in the year, the true Christian does *spiritually* every day in the year; for through Christ we all are “made kings and priests unto our God.” Paint to yourselves, then, the high-priest in his occasional access to God; and there you see the Christian going continually within the veil, or rather habitually dwelling there, and “making God himself his habitation^c.” And truly this is “a secret place,” of which an unconverted man has no conception: it is “the secret of God’s pavilion, the secret of his tabernacle^d.” But we must divest ourselves of the notion of locality: for this place is wherever God manifests his more immediate presence: and therefore David beautifully calls it, “the secret of his *presence*^e.” There the Believer dwells: and, O! who can conceive “the fellowship which he there enjoys with God the Father and with the Lord Jesus Christ^f;” whilst they, with condescending and affectionate endearment, come to him, and abidingly feast with him^g. In truth, the communion between God and the soul is such as no language can convey: it is nothing less than a mutual in-dwelling, resembling that which subsists between the Father and the Son; they being in God, and God in them; yea, and being one with God, and God with them^h — — — This is a mercy which the Believer alone enjoys. But some little idea of it may be formed from the favour conferred upon the camp of Israel in the wilderness. The cloudy pillar led them in all

^b Bishop Lowth and Bishop Horne. See Bishop Horne on the place.
^c ver. 9. ^d Ps. xxvii. 5. ^e Ps. xxxi. 20.

^f 1 John i. 3. ^g John xiv. 21, 23. Rev. iii. 20.

^h Compare John vi. 56, and 1 John iv. 15, 16. with John xvii. 21—23.

their way, affording them shade by day from the heat of the burning sun, and light throughout the night season. To no other people under heaven was this ever vouchsafed. And so it is with the camp of the true Israelites at this day: they, and they only, behold the light of God's countenance in the night-season of adversity; and they alone are sheltered from every thing that would oppress and overwhelm their souls; as it is written, "The Lord will create upon every dwelling-place of Mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory shall be a defence¹."]]

2. In plain terms—

[The workings of his mind, under all the trials and difficulties which he has to encounter, are here set forth. He is convinced that no created arm can be sufficient for him. Hence he directs his eyes towards the Creator himself, and saith of him, "He is my refuge" from every trouble: "He is my fortress" against every assailant: "He is my God," all whose powers and perfections shall be employed for me. "In Him will I trust," in Him only and exclusively; in Him always, under all circumstances; in Him, with perfect confidence and unshaken affiance. The man is not like the ungodly world, who know not what to do, and are at their wit's end when trouble comes: he is "in the secret place of the Most High;" and, where others can see nothing, he beholds "chariots of fire and horses of fire all around him^k," or, rather, he beholds "God himself as a wall of fire round about him^l," and has the very glory of God resting on him^m. Thus is the true Believer distinguished from all others: "he beholds Him who is invisibleⁿ;" and walks as in his immediate presence, saying, "If God be for me, who can be against me?"

Shall this be thought an exaggerated description? I do not say that the Divine presence is equally realized by all, or by any equally at all times: there are seasons when a Peter may be "of little faith^o;" and a Paul may need a special revelation for his support, saying to him, "Be not afraid; but speak, and hold not thy peace; for I am with thee; and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee^p." Nevertheless, in the general habit of their mind, their language is like that of David; "I will love thee, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower. I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies^q."]]

¹ Isai. iv. 5.

^k 2 Kings vi. 17.

^l Zech. ii. 5.

^m 1 Pet. iv. 14.

ⁿ Heb. xi. 27.

^o Matt. xiv. 31.

^p Acts xviii. 9, 10.

^q Ps. xviii. 1—3.

With such views of the believer's character, you can have no doubt of,

II. His blessedness—

Here let the abruptness of the address be borne in mind. The Psalmist, instead of proceeding, as might have been expected, to declare the blessings which a person of this description should receive, addresses himself to that person in these animated terms: "Surely he shall deliver *thee* from the snare of the fowler and from the noisome pestilence; he shall cover *thee* with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler." now, in these terms, he, in the very name of God himself, and in the most assured manner, pledges to him the protection,

1. Of God's power—

[If war were raging in our country; or pestilence, like that which desolated Judea after David had numbered the people, and which probably gave occasion to this psalm, were carrying off multitudes all around us; we should enter more fully into the subject before us, and see more forcibly the exalted privileges of the true Believer. But we must remember that there is a *moral* "pestilence" raging all around us, and sweeping myriads into the pit of destruction. We should remember, too, that there is a *spiritual* "fowler," who entangles, in his net, millions, unwary as the silly bird, and "leads them captive at his will". What is the example of men in every walk of life, but one deadly contagion, from which it is almost impossible to escape? And what are those lusts and temptations with which we are continually beset, but baits, whereby the devil seeketh to ensnare us to our everlasting ruin? And who can preserve us from these snares, but God himself? Little will human wisdom or power avail against such potent enemies. Peter imagined himself secure enough from denying his Lord, when he formed so steadfast a resolution respecting it: but, as our Lord had forewarned him, "the cock did not crow twice, till he had denied him thrice." And whomsoever Satan should get into his sieve, he would prove us all to be chaff, if we should be left without timely succour from on high^s. But "God will keep the feet of his saints^t," and not suffer them to fall a prey to the destroyer. The care of a hen over her brood is well known. When a bird of prey is hovering over them,

^r 2 Tim. ii. 26. Τοῦ δαιμόλου παγίδος ἐζωορρημένοι.

^s Luke xxii. 31.

^t 1 Sam. ii. 9.

she calls them under her wings, and there preserves them in perfect safety. The bird of prey, when searching for them, can behold nothing but the dam. Thus will God preserve his people from all their enemies: "He will cover them with his feathers, and under his wings shall they trust:" yea, "their lives shall be hid with Christ in God," beyond the reach of harm: and because "Christ himself is their life, when he shall appear, they also shall appear with him in glory^u." What was done by God for Israel in the wilderness, shall be done by him for every soul that puts its trust in him^x — — —]

2. Of his faithfulness—

[For every believer the very truth of God is pledged; and "life is promised" to him by a "God who cannot lie^y." It is not said that the believer shall not be tempted, or "be in heaviness through manifold temptations: but that he shall not be finally overcome, God does engage; as the Apostle says: "*God is faithful*, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it^z." Here, I say, the very faithfulness of God is pledged; and we may be sure, that "of all the good things which he has promised to his people, not one shall ever fail^a." No doubt they may through weakness be overcome for a season, as the lives of the most eminent saints but too clearly prove. But in such a case God has told us how he will act towards them: "If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless, my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, *nor suffer my faithfulness to fail*; my covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips: for once have I sworn by my holiness, that I will not lie unto David^b." Of course, we are not to understand this of one who sins wilfully and habitually: for, whatever he may profess, he is no child of God, but a downright hypocrite: but of the weakest of real saints it is spoken; and to him it shall assuredly be fulfilled: for "it is not the will of our Father that one of his little ones should perish^c."]

For a just IMPROVEMENT of this passage, let it be remembered,

1. In what way alone we can have access to God—

[We have spoken of the believer as "dwelling in God:" but how came he into that sanctuary? and where did he find

^u Col. iii. 3, 4.

^x Deut. xxxii. 9—12. ^y Tit. i. 2.

^z 1 Cor. x. 13.

^a Josh. xxiii. 14.

^b Ps. lxxxix. 30—35.

^c Matt. xviii. 14.

a door of entrance? This is a point that should be well understood. There is but one way to the Father; and that is by Christ. Our blessed Lord himself tells us this, when he says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: *no man cometh unto the Father but by me.*" It must never be forgotten, that in ourselves we are altogether departed from God; and that we can be "brought nigh only by the blood of Jesus." It was by the blood of his sacrifice alone, that the High Priest, of whom we have before spoken, could come into the holy place of the Most High^d: and it is by the blood of Jesus alone that we can venture into the holiest^e, or presume to ask any thing at the hands of God^f. I beseech you, therefore, to bear this in remembrance, and never to call God *yours*, until you have come to him in his appointed way — — —]

2. What is that kind of confidence which we ought to maintain—

[It must not be a presumptuous confidence, that overlooks the use of means or supersedes the necessity of holy fear. Satan could not be better served than by such confidence as that. And hence it was, that, in tempting our blessed Lord, he cited this very psalm, and urged a part of it as a warrant for him to cast himself down from a pinnacle of the temple; saying, "If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone^g." Our Lord's reply to him shews us our duty in relation to this matter; "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." We are not needlessly to expose ourselves to dangers, in the expectation that God will preserve us: nor are we to neglect the use of means, as though God were engaged to work miracles in our behalf. We must be humble, watchful, diligent; as it is written, "Give all diligence to make your calling and election sure." God has, indeed, engaged to "give us both to will and to do:" but, whilst we depend on him for his effectual aid, we must "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling^h." In every step of our way to Zion, we must cry, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe."]

3. What should be the frame of our minds after we have come to him—

[I have said, 'We should fear;' for "blessed is the man that feareth always." But this fear should *temper*, not *weaken*, our confidence in God. Hear what the Prophet Isaiah says: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee; because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the Lord for

^d Heb. ix. 7.

^e Heb. x. 19.

^f Heb. x. 20—22.

^g ver. 11, 12. with Matt. iv. 6.

^h Phil. ii. 12, 13.

ever; for with the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength^l." St. Paul maintained to the uttermost the fear of which we have been speaking; for he "kept under his body, and brought it into subjection; lest that by any means, after he had preached to others, he himself should be a cast-away^k." But his confidence in God was entire. He defied all the powers in the universe to separate him from the love of God^l——— And you, also, may possess the same blessed hope, "knowing in whom you have believed^m," and assured that none shall ever pluck you out of the Saviour's handsⁿ.]

^l Isai. xxvi. 3, 4.
^m 2 Tim. i. 12.

^k 1 Cor. ix. 27.
ⁿ John x. 28.

¹ Rom. viii. 33—39.

DCLV.

THE SECURITY OF THOSE WHO DWELL IN GOD.

Ps. xci. 9, 10. *Because thou hast made the Lord which is my refuge, even the Most High, thy habitation, there shall no evil befall thee.*

IT is scarcely possible to conceive any terms more strong, or any images more lively, than those in which the Scripture represents the privileges of believers. We need look no further than to the psalm before us for a confirmation of this truth. Indeed, according to the view given of this psalm by a learned prelate, there is, in the first verses of it, an emphasis which cannot be surpassed^a. And the whole may be considered as the believer's charter, in which all his privileges are contained, from his first acceptance with God to the consummation of his happiness in glory.

We have in the words of our text a just description of the believer :

I. His experience—

The true Christian is one who has been "turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God." Being once brought to God, he "makes the Most High his habitation." He regards God, not

^a Bishop Horne reads the two first verses thus : " He that dwelleth &c. *who abideth* under &c. *who saith* of the Lord," &c. Then at the end of ver. 2, he supposes the Psalmist to break off abruptly, and, instead of continuing his description, to address himself to the person before described ; " Surely he shall deliver *thee*."

merely as reconciled to him, but as affording him (what a dwelling-house affords to its possessor),

1. Free access—

[A person goes familiarly to his house at all times, not doubting but that he shall gain a ready admission into it. He considers it as his own, and feels that it exists only for his accommodation. It is thus that the believer goes to God as his God: he has “access to him with boldness and confidence:” he is certain that, when he calls, he shall receive an answer; and “when he knocks, the door will be opened to him.” In this precise view the Psalmist speaks of God; “Be thou my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort^b.”]

2. Necessary provision—

[Every man, whatever be his situation in life, expects to find in his own house the things suited to his necessities. He does not seek his meals at the houses of his neighbours, but in his own; and he returns home at stated seasons to partake of them. And whither does the believer go for daily supplies of bread for his soul? It is in Christ Jesus that his fulness is treasured up; and in him the believer expects to find the “grace that is sufficient for him.” God invites him to come to him for the express purpose, that he may be filled and satisfied with good things: “Wherefore do ye spend your money for that which is not bread? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness^c.”]

3. Sure protection—

[If storms descend, or dangers menace, we take refuge in our house, and find it a place of safety. Thus “The name of God also is a strong tower, into which the righteous runneth and is safe^d.” It is to himself that God invites us, when he says, “Come my people, enter thou into thy chambers, shut the door about thee, and hide thyself for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast^e.” And that this was a primary idea in the mind of the Psalmist, appears from the very words of the text, wherein he calls God “his Refuge,” and from the whole scope of the psalm, from the beginning to the end. With this also agrees the beautiful description given of Jesus by the Prophet, as “an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest^f.”]

4. Sweet repose—

[To his house a man retires from the noise and bustle of the world; and there he lays himself down to rest after the fatigues of the day. Home, though inferior in many respects to places of temporary residence, is to almost all persons the

^b Ps. lxxi. 3.

^c Isai. lv. 2.

^d Prov. xviii. 10.

^e Isai. xxvi. 20.

^f Isai. xxxii. 2.

most agreeable, because they are most at ease. And such is God to the believer. "In every place, God is to him as a little sanctuary^g," where he finds himself at rest. He carries his wants to God, and "casts all his care on him," and enjoys that peace which passeth all understanding. In this sense he says *for his own encouragement*, "Return unto thy Rest, O my soul:" and attests *for the glory of his God*, "Lord thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations^h."]

In connexion with this experience of the believer, let us consider,

II. His privilege—

The expression in the text seems to exceed the bounds of truth: but the more it is examined, the more will it be found to be strictly true. The man who makes God his habitation shall have no evil befall him:

1. None here—

[No *casual* evil shall befall him. There is no such thing as chance; every thing, even to the falling of a sparrow, is ordered of the Lord. As for the children of God, "their heavenly Father hath given his angels charge over them, to keep them in all their waysⁱ;" and if any thing were to happen to them, *they* (the angels) would contract a fearful responsibility for their neglect. We must not however imagine that Believers are at liberty to rush into needless dangers; for our Lord, when tempted by Satan to cast himself from a pinnacle of the Temple in expectation that the angels would preserve him from injury, replied, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God:" but nothing can happen to them except by the Divine appointment: they are hid in the shadow of their Father's hand, and "their very hairs are all numbered."

But it may be thought that *penal* evil may come to them. This however we utterly deny. That they may be "visited with the rod," we readily acknowledge: but there is a great difference between the vindictive arm of an incensed judge, and the gentle chastisements of an indulgent parent. The cup that may at any time be put into their hands may be bitter; but it has not in it one drop of wrath: it is altogether mixed by love; and not an ingredient can be found in it, which they themselves shall not one day confess to have been salutary and beneficial.

In short, no *real* evil shall befall them. That they may have troubles, is certain: that their troubles may be heavy and accumulated, is also certain. But who accounts even the amputation of a limb *evil*, if it be the only and infallible method of

^g Ezek. xi. 16.

^h Ps. xc. 1.

ⁱ ver. 11, 12.

preserving life? Much less then are any sufferings to be accounted evil, which the Believer can ever be called to sustain: for he shall never endure any, which shall not work for good to him in this life, and be the means of increasing his weight of glory in the next^k."]

2. None hereafter—

[It is in this life only that the Believer can meet with even the semblance of evil: when he goes hence, he is instantly placed beyond the reach of harm. No sin, no sorrow, no pain, no temptation, no weariness, no want, can ever be felt by him in the mansions of bliss. He will there enjoy for ever one unclouded day! and his happiness will be without alloy, without intermission, without end^l."]

To render this subject more instructive, we shall ADD a word,

1. Of direction—

[Christ, in reference to the sheepfold of his church, says, "I am the door; if any man enter in by me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture^m." The same figure we may apply to the subject before us: "Christ is the door;" he is "the way to the Father;" and "no man cometh unto the Father, but by him." To those who come to God in any other way, he is not "a Refuge," or "Habitation," but "a consuming fireⁿ." But if we believe in Christ, then "will he dwell in us, and we shall dwell in him^o:" yea, "he will be our house of defence, to save us for ever^p."]

2. Of warning—

[Who, except the believer, can apply to himself the promise in the text? As for the unbelieving and disobedient, they are in danger every hour: they know not but that God's wrath may break forth against them the very next moment to their destruction. Of this they are certain, (whether they will believe it or not,) that in a little time his judgments shall overtake them, and the greatest of all evils shall befall them, unless they repent. O that they would be prevailed upon to flee for refuge to the hope that is set before them! O that they would now seek to be "found in Christ!" Then should the destroying angel pass over them, and "they should dwell safely, and be quiet from the fear of evil^q."]

3. Of encouragement—

[The weakness of men's faith often robs them of the comfort which it is their privilege to enjoy. Why should a believer

^k Rom. viii. 28. and 2 Cor. iv. 17.

^l Rev. xxi. 4.

^m John x. 9.

ⁿ Heb. xii. 29.

^o John vi. 56.

^p Ps. xxxi. 2.

^q Prov. i. 33.

be afraid of thunder and lightning? Were he but sensible what a Protector he has, he would feel assured that no evil could come unto him. How varied are God's promises to him in the psalm before us! How diversified also are the assurances given him by Eliphaz in the book of Job^r! Let him only commit himself to God, and he has nothing to fear. Let us then, beloved, have faith in God; and let those words of David be our song in this land of our pilgrimage; "God is our refuge, &c.; therefore will we not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the waters be carried into the midst of the sea^s: &c."]

^r Job v. 19—24.^s Ps. xlvii. 1—4.

DCLVI.

THE CHARACTER AND PRIVILEGES OF THE GODLY.

Ps. xci. 14—16. *Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him. With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation.*

THE Scriptures are the charter of the Christian's privileges. They contain the most minute and accurate description of his character, and set forth, in all the variety of expression that language can afford, the blessings he enjoys. The declarations concerning him in this Psalm may certainly be interpreted as relating to the Messiah, because when a passage out of it was applied to Christ, he did not deny its reference to himself, but shewed with what limitations the passage was to be understood^a. That it refers also to the church cannot admit of doubt. Throughout the whole of it the character and blessedness of God's people are delineated; but with peculiar force and beauty in the concluding verses. In discoursing upon them we shall consider,

I. The character of God's people—

They "know the name" of God—

[The name of God as proclaimed by himself, is recorded in the Scriptures^b; and the Christian has a view of him as

^a Compare ver. 11, 12. with Matt. iv. 6, 7. ^b Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.

possessed of those very perfections which are there ascribed to him. He particularly sees these perfections harmonizing, and glorified, in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ; or, if he be not perfectly clear in his views of these things, he at least is sensible that the divine mercy flows only in one channel, and can be imparted only through the atoning blood of Christ.]

They so know him as to “set their love upon him”—

[It is not a mere speculative knowledge that Christians possess (in *this* the ungodly may far surpass them), but such a practical knowledge as influences their heart and life. They feel an interest in every perfection of the Deity. The justice and holiness of God are as amiable in their eyes as his love and mercy. From what they know of him they are constrained to love him, yea, to “set their love upon him,” with intenseness of desire and fixedness of affection.]

They wait upon him in continual prayer—

[Others may keep up an outward form of devotion, or even be exceedingly earnest in prayer on some particular occasion; but they alone can maintain a real intercourse with the Deity, who have been taught by the Holy Spirit both to know and love him. When they have been thus enlightened and renewed, they will feel the necessity, and taste the sweetness, of secret prayer, and will account it their highest honour and happiness to have access unto their God at the throne of grace; nor will they ever be satisfied with the worship they offer, if they do not “worship him in spirit and in truth.”]

In perfect correspondence with their character will be found,

II. Their privileges—

There is nothing good which shall be withheld from them in time or eternity. God will vouchsafe to them,

1. Answers to prayer—

[They who offer their petitions only in a formal manner, never expect an answer to them. They conceive that all testimonies from God respecting the acceptance of our prayers are chimerical and enthusiastic in the extreme. But God is at no loss to impart to his people a clear and lively sense of his approbation. He most assuredly will answer them, though not by tokens that may be heard or seen, yet by sensible communications, and effectual interpositions. Are they laden with guilt? their burthen shall be removed, and they shall be filled with peace and joy. Are they bowed down under trials and temptations? they shall be strengthened by his grace, and be made more than conquerors over all. And though they cannot infallibly conclude from any feelings of their mind that God has

answered their prayers, yet their feelings, in conjunction with the effects produced by them, will enable them to ascertain it, at least sufficiently for their own encouragement^c.]

2. Deliverances from trouble—

[The people of God are exposed to troubles no less than others. But they are supported under them by the presence of their God. As the Son of man walked with the Hebrew youths in the furnace, so will he with all his afflicted people; nor shall a hair of their head be singed. As a refiner he will carefully watch over every vessel, moderating the heat that would injure it, and bringing out the vessel as soon as his purposes in submitting it to the fire have been fully answered. This is twice declared in the text; and in due season shall it be experienced by every true believer.]

3. Present honour—

[The saints are, for the most part, loaded with contempt and ignominy. Yet the very persons who persecute them most, have frequently, like Herod, an inward reverence for them in their hearts. But, however they may be treated by the ungodly, they are universally respected by the saints. The very angels account it their honour and happiness to minister unto them. They are lights in the world, and living witnesses for God to all around them: and “God himself is not ashamed to be called their God.” They are already exalted to the rank and dignity of God’s children; and are made “heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ.”]

4. Everlasting glory—

[How far length of days is to be expected as the reward of piety under the Gospel dispensation, we cannot absolutely determine. But the true Christian will be “satisfied with his life,” whether it be long or short. He does not wish for the termination of it merely because he is dissatisfied with his present state, but because he longs for his inheritance. He has Pisgah views of the promised land even here: and as soon as he has finished his appointed course, God will shew him his full salvation; causing him to behold all its glory and enjoy all its blessedness. Then shall be given to him a life which will fully satisfy his most enlarged desires. God will say to him, in the presence of the whole assembled universe, ‘Come thou servant, whom I have decreed to “set on high,” see the kingdom that was prepared for thee from eternity; take possession of it as thine own, and inherit it for ever^d.’]

INFER—

1. In how pitiable a state are the ignorant and ungodly world!

^c Ps. cxxxviii. 3.

^d Matt. xxv. 34.

[Being ignorant of God, and destitute of any real love to him, they have no part or lot in his salvation. They are strangers to all those sublime pleasures, which are communicated to God's peculiar people. The witness of the Spirit, and many other unspeakably precious tokens of the divine favour, are withheld from them. If they be in trouble, they have no heavenly consolations to support them. They may have the wealth of this world, and the honour which cometh of men; but they can expect no salvation from God, nor any thing but shame and everlasting contempt^e. O that they were wise and would consider these things!]

2. How plain and simple is the duty of God's people!

[The privileges before mentioned, are all bestowed on us *because* we love and seek the Lord. Not that our services are *meritorious*, and can claim a "reward of debt;" but God has appointed these as means, in the use of which we shall attain the end. Would we then have more abundant tokens of God's favour here, and secure a still richer inheritance hereafter? Let us study to "grow in the knowledge of him," and in a more fervent and fixed love towards him. Let us wait upon him more earnestly and with greater constancy in prayer. Thus shall his blessings infinitely exceed our highest expectations, and be enjoyed by us when the fleeting vanities of time shall be no more.]

^e Dan. xii. 2.

DCLVII.

GOD ADMIRÉD IN HIS WORKS.

Ps. xcii. 4, 5. *Thou, Lord, hast made me glad through thy work: I will triumph in the works of thy hands. O Lord, how great are thy works! and thy thoughts are very deep.*

TO man, in this vale of tears, God has opened many sources of happiness; many in his intercourse with his fellow-man, but more and greater in communion with his God. In truth, if it be not his own fault, he may have in a measure the felicity of the *Paradiacal* state restored to him: for though, through the weakness of the flesh, "he is in heaviness through manifold temptations," he has a God to go unto, a God ever at hand, in whom it is his privilege always to rejoice: "Rejoice in the Lord always," says the Apostle; and "again," he adds, "Rejoice."

The frame of David's mind, in the psalm before us, (for we can scarcely doubt but that the composition

was his,) being that which we should cultivate, we will consider,

I. The works which he contemplated—

It is probable that the writer of this psalm had primarily in his view the wonders of *creation*; because the psalm was written for the Sabbath-day^a, which was instituted to commemorate God's rest from his creating work. Yet, in the body of the psalm, much is spoken respecting the dispensations of God in his *providence*: and David, whom I consider as the author of it, had experienced the most wonderful interpositions in his behalf; so that, amongst all the children of men, there was not one who had more cause than he to sing of "the loving-kindness and the faithfulness of Jehovah;" of his "loving-kindness," in selecting *him* to such high destinies; and his "faithfulness," in accomplishing to him his promises in their full extent. But the language of my text necessarily leads our minds to that greatest and most stupendous of all God's works, the work of *Redemption*—

[This may be treated either in reference to Redemption *generally*, as wrought out for us by the incarnation, and death, and resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ; or with a *special* reference to any one of these topics which may be suited to a particular season. But, in whatever way it be treated, *the greatness* of the work must be the point chiefly insisted on.]

II. His experience in the contemplation of them—

He was filled,

1. With triumphant joy—

[It is not possible to view these wonders of Redeeming Love, and not feel the reasonableness of that command: "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice^b." Well does the Psalmist say, "It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord." It is indeed good, at all *times*^c, and in every possible *way*^d. In this holy exercise should every faculty of our souls be engaged^e.]

2. With adoring gratitude—

[*This*, after all, is the fittest expression of our joy. The wonders of God's love are so stupendous, that all attempts to

^a See the title to the Psalm.

^b Phil. iv. 4.

^c ver. 2.

^d ver. 3.

^e Ps. ciii. 1.

celebrate them aright must fail; and silence, the profoundest silence, on such a subject, if proceeding from an overwhelming sense of it, may justly be accounted the sublimest eloquence. The Psalmist's experience was of this kind^f; as were St. Paul's also, when he exclaimed, "O the depth^g!"

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are strangers to this frame—

[Alas! how little is this state of mind experienced by the generality of Christians! and in what humiliating terms is their insensibility described in the words following my text! I would not speak offensively, or wound the feelings of any: but I would ask you, whether David speaks too strongly, when he characterizes such persons as "brutish and fools^h?" You well know that the prophets often speak the same languageⁱ; and I pray you to repent of your insensibility, that these characters may no longer attach to you.]

2. Those who aspire after it—

[Let your thoughts soar to high and heavenly things; and especially let them be occupied on the works of God, and on his perfections as displayed in the great mystery of Redemption. Surely you shall not long meditate on these things in vain. Your God will cause you to "triumph in Christ Jesus." But never rest, till you have those overwhelming views of Christ which characterize the worship of heaven. The glorified saints and angels all fall upon their faces before the throne: seek ye the same frame of mind with them; and soon you shall join with them in everlasting hallelujahs to God and to the Lamb.]

^f ver. 5.

^g Rom. xi. 33.

^h ver. 6.

ⁱ Isai. i. 3. and Jer. viii. 7.

DCLVIII.

THE BELIEVER'S SECURITY.

Ps. xcii. 12—15. *The righteous shall flourish like the palm-tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing; to shew that the Lord is upright: he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.*

WELL may we be filled with gratitude, whilst we contemplate the wonders of creation and of providence^a: but deeper far are the wonders of redeeming

^a ver. 1—5.

love, secured as they are to the saints by the immutable perfections of God. "A brutish man, indeed, knows them not; nor does a fool understand them^b:" but those who "are anointed with that heavenly unction which teacheth them all things^c" have an insight into them, and can attest the truth of the assertions of the Psalmist, whilst he declares,

I. The privileges of the righteous—

"The righteous" are indeed highly favoured of the Lord. To them, amidst innumerable other blessings, are secured,

1. Stability—

[“The palm-tree and the cedar” are trees of most majestic growth; the one retaining its foliage all the year, and the other pre-eminent in respect of strength and durability. And like these shall the righteous “flourish:” nothing shall despoil them of their beauty, nothing shall subvert their souls — — — They may indeed be assailed with many storms and tempests; but they shall not be cast down; or, if cast down, shall not be destroyed^d — — — Being once “planted in the house of the Lord, they shall flourish in the courts of our God,” never withering for want of nourishment^e, nor ever decaying by the lapse of years^f.]

2. Fruitfulness—

[The Gospel, wherever it comes, brings forth fruit^g; and all who receive it aright become “fat and flourishing,” “being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God^h. For every season in the year they have appropriate fruitⁱ: and even to “old age,” when other trees decay, these retain their vigour and fertility. There may, indeed, be a difference in the fruits produced by them at the different periods of life; that of youth being more beautiful to the eye; and that of age, more pleasant to the taste, as savouring less of crudity, and as being more richly flavoured through the influence of many ripening suns. “The fruits of the Spirit,” indeed, are seen in both^k; but in one, the fruit of activity and zeal; and in the other, a patient waiting for the coming of their Lord^l. To the latest hour of their existence shall they bring forth fruit unto God^m, and God shall be “glorified in themⁿ.” Never shall their leaf wither or their fruit fail, till they are transplanted to the Paradise above.]

^b ver. 6.

^c 1 John ii. 20, 27.

^d Job v. 19. Ps. xxxiv. 19. 2 Cor. iv. 8—10.

^e Ps. i. 3. and Jer. xvii. 8. ^f Isai. lxxv. 22. ^g Col. i. 6.

^h Phil. i. 11. ⁱ Ezek. xlvii. 12. ^k Gal. v. 22, 23.

^l 1 Cor. i. 7. ^m Hos. xiv. 5—7. ⁿ Isai. lxi. 3.

The confidence with which David announces to the righteous their privileges, will lead us to consider,

II. Their security for the enjoyment of them—

God has solemnly engaged to confer these blessings upon them—

[From all eternity did he enter into covenant with his dear Son, that “if HE would make his soul an offering for sin, he should see a seed, who should prolong their days; and the pleasure of the Lord should prosper in his hand^o.” The terms being accepted by the Lord Jesus, a people were “given to him;” with an assurance that not one of them should ever be lost^p. Accordingly, we find innumerable promises made to them, that “God will keep their feet^q,” and carry on his work in their hearts^r, and “preserve them blameless unto his heavenly kingdom^s.”]

From respect to these engagements, he will assuredly fulfil his word—

[Not one jot or tittle of his word shall fail^t. His children may, indeed, by their transgressions, call forth some tokens of his displeasure: yet, though he visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes, his loving-kindness will he not utterly take from them, nor suffer his faithfulness to fail. His covenant will he not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of his lips; for once he has sworn by his holiness, that he will not lie unto David^u. Having thus pledged his truth and faithfulness in their behalf^x, and engaged never to leave them till he has accomplished in them and for them all that he has promised^y, he considers his own honour as involved in their happiness^z; and would account himself “unrighteous,” if he left so much as one of them to perish^a. But “he cannot lie^b :” and, therefore, all who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them, may have the most abundant consolation^c, in an assured expectation that “he will perfect that which concerneth them^d,” and “keep them, by his own power, unto everlasting salvation^e.”]

Comforting as this Scripture is, it needs to be very carefully guarded from abuse. Permit me, then, to ADDRESS myself,

^o Isai. liii. 10.

^p John xvii. 2, 6, 9, 10—12, 24.

^q 1 Sam. ii. 9.

^r Phil. i. 6.

^s 1 Cor. i. 8. 1 Thess. v. 23.

^t Isai. liv. 9, 10.

^u Ps. lxxxix. 30—35.

^x 1 Thess. v. 24.

^y Heb. xiii. 5, 6.

^z Ezek. xxxix. 25.

^a Heb. vi. 10.

^b Tit. i. 2.

^c Heb. vi. 17, 18.

^d Ps. cxxxviii. 8.

^e 1 Pet. i. 5.

1. To those who are indulging in undue security—

[Is there any one that will dare to say, 'I cannot fall; or, if I fall, I cannot but rise again: for, if God were to leave me to perish, he would be unfaithful and unjust?' I must reply to such an one, 'Thou art on the very border and precipice of hell.' Who art thou, that *thou* shouldst not fall, when David, and Solomon, and Peter fell? Or, who art thou, that *thou* must be raised again, when Demas, as far as we know, fell for ever? Hast thou been up to heaven, and seen thy name written in the Book of Life? Hast thou inspected that covenant which was made between the Father and the Son, and seen that thou wast among the number of those who were given to Christ before the foundation of the world? "The Lord knoweth them that are his;" but who besides him possesses that knowledge? What knowest *thou*, except as far as causes can be discerned by their effects? Thou hast experienced what *appears to be* a work of grace in thy soul. Be thankful: but be not over confident: thousands have deceived themselves: and thou mayest have done the same. Could it be *infallibly* ascertained that thou wast given to Christ before the foundation of the world, and, in consequence of God's engagement with him, wast effectually called to a state of union with him, we will acknowledge that none should ever pluck thee out of the Father's hands^f: for "his gifts and calling are without repentance^g." But, as this can never be ascertained but by a special revelation from God, I must say to thee, and would say, if thou wert the most eminent Christian upon earth, "Be not high-minded, but fear^h." It is certain that multitudes of most distinguished professors have apostatized from their faith: and such may be thine end; yea, and will, if thy confidence be so daring and presumptuous: and, if this should be thine unhappy fate, we shall not for one moment question the fidelity of God; but shall say of you, as St. John did of the apostates in his day, "They went out from us; but they were not of us: for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of usⁱ."]]

2. To those who have actually backslidden from God—

[Are there none of this character amongst us? Would to God there were not! But look back, I pray you, and see whether it is still with you as it was in "the day of your espousals^k." Have none of you "left your first love^l?" Time was, perhaps, when the concerns of your souls were of such

^f John x. 27—29.

^g Rom. xi. 29.

^h Rom. xi. 20.

ⁱ 1 John ii. 19.

^k Jer. ii. 2.

^l Rev. ii. 4.

importance in your eyes, that you thought you could never do enough to promote their eternal interests. The word of God and prayer were then, as it were, your daily food: you walked with God all the day long. To maintain communion with him was your highest delight: you dreaded every thing that might draw you from him: your bodies and souls were, like living sacrifices, offered to him daily upon his altar. But how is it with you now? Perhaps at this time any formal service will suffice to satisfy the conscience: the duties of the closet are become irksome to you; the world has regained an ascendant over your minds; and evil tempers, which once appeared subdued and mortified, display themselves on every occasion, to the destruction of your own peace, and to the annoyance of all around you. Ah! think what dishonour you do to God, and what cause of triumph you give to his enemies. Through your misconduct, “the way of truth is evil spoken of,” and “the very name of God is blasphemed.” But His word is true, whether men stumble over it or not: and, whatever a profane world may imagine, “He is a Rock; and there is no unrighteousness in him.” But delude not yourselves with notions about electing love, or God’s faithfulness to his promises. The only promises in which ye have any part, are those which are made to weeping penitents: “Repent ye, then, without delay, and do your first works^m,” else “you shall be filled with your own waysⁿ,” and reap for ever the bitter fruit of your own devices^o.]

2. To those who are holding on in the good way—

[You are living witnesses for God, that he is both merciful and “upright.” You know whence it is that you have been preserved. You know that you would have fallen, even as others, if he had not upheld you in his everlasting arms. Give Him the glory, then; and cast yourselves altogether upon him. Beg of him to water your roots, and to make you “fruitful in every good work.” Entreat him, not only “not to turn away from you, but to put his fear in your hearts, that you may never depart from him^p.” So may you look forward to all the occurrences of life with a joyful hope, that you shall be preserved even to the end, and be “more than conquerors through Him that loved you^q.” The proper medium to be observed, is that between presumptuous hope and servile fear. A filial confidence is your high privilege: and you may go forward with joy, knowing in whom you have believed, that He is both able and willing to keep that which you have committed to him^r,” and that he will be eternally glorified in the salvation of your souls.]

^m Rev. ii. 5. ⁿ Prov. xiv. 14. ^o Prov. i. 31. and xxii. 8.
^p Jer. xxxii. 40. ^q Rom. viii. 35—39. ^r 2 Tim. i. 12.

DCLIX.

COMFORT IN GOD.

Ps. xciv. 19. *In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul.*

TO judge of the efficacy of Divine grace, we should see it in actual exercise, and under circumstances calculated to display its power. The writer of this psalm, whoever he was, (for respecting the author or the occasion of it we have no certain information,) was sorely oppressed under the sanction and authority of legal enactments. But he committed his cause to God; and warned his oppressors that they should give an account of their conduct before another tribunal, where their atheistical impiety would receive its just reward^a. At the same time, he declared that he had heartfelt consolations, of which it was not in their power to deprive him: for that “in the multitude of his thoughts, which their cruelty excited within him, God’s comforts delighted his soul.”

In these words we see,

I. The fluctuations of mind to which the saints are exposed—

When men become saints, they are not raised above the feelings of mortality: they still have the common sensibilities of men, and consequently are exposed to great fluctuations of mind:

1. In reference to their temporal concerns—

[As members of society, they must be engaged in earthly occupations of some kind; and must depend, not on themselves only, but on others also, for their prosperity in the world. The misfortunes of others may involve them; and, without any fault of their own, they may be drawn into circumstances of most painful embarrassment. In such a predicament, it would ill become them to be careless and unconcerned. They must of necessity have many thoughts, how to extricate themselves from their trouble, and to maintain their good character before men — — —

In a domestic relation, too, the saint cannot be insensible to the welfare of his wife and children: their health, their honour, their happiness, must of necessity occupy a deep interest

^a ver. 5—10, 20—23.

in his mind, and be sources of much anxiety within him — — —
Religion is not intended to destroy these feelings, but only to regulate them, and to render them subservient to his spiritual welfare — — —]

2. In reference to the concerns of their souls—

[The very intent of piety is, to make every thing that relates to eternity interesting to the soul. Now the saint, in this present state of warfare, cannot always preserve the same state of sublime and spiritual affection: there will be seasons of comparative darkness and deadness, and seasons too of temptation, when Satan has gained some advantage over him. Now, such ought to be seasons of deeper humiliation to the soul: and, together with contrition, there will often arise doubts and fears, which will fill the soul with most distressing perplexity. David himself sometimes had his fears, lest God should have cast him off for ever^b: and similar apprehensions are experienced by the Lord's people, in every age and in every place — — —]

But in the example before us we see,

II. The consolations which God administers to them in their troubles—

Truly they have comforts which the world knows not of: they have for their refreshment and delight,

1. The comforts of God's word—

[The Scriptures are a "well of salvation, from whence they draw water with joy." In them they behold the character of God, exhibited as it were at full length, in all the dispensations of his providence and grace. There they see how God has dealt with his people in every age, ordering every thing according to the counsels of his unerring wisdom, and overruling every thing for their eternal good. There they behold him as a refiner, regulating the furnace into which he puts his vessels; and watching the process, in order to bring them forth in due season, fit for the master's use. There they see the "covenant ordered in all things and sure^c;" and there they find promises without number, exactly suited to their state. These are as marrow and fatness to their souls; and, nourished by these, they not only bear with patience, but glory and exult in, all their trials — — — Encouraged by these promises, they are content to go into the furnace, assured that they shall come forth, at last, purified as gold.]

2. The comforts of his Spirit—

[Afflictions are seasons when God for the most part manifests himself to the souls of his people. The Son of man

^b Ps. lxxvii. 7—10.

^c 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

then walks most visibly with them, when they are put into the furnace for his sake. In the mount of difficulty and trial he will be seen. In his people's extremity he vouchsafes to them his richest communications, imparting to them his Holy Spirit, as a Comforter, to witness their adoption into his family, and to seal them unto the day of redemption. Yea, so abundantly does he sometimes "shed abroad his love in their hearts," that they are fearful of losing their trials, lest they should lose at the same time their consolations also. Such were the comforts administered to the Apostle Paul^d; and such shall be the portion of all who take the Lord for their God.]

SEE—

1. How highly the saint is favoured above all other people upon earth!

[What source of comfort can the worldling find, in his trials? The whole creation is to him but "a broken cistern that can hold no water." It is the saint alone that has a never-failing source of joy and bliss — — —]

2. How desirable it is to acquaint ourselves with God!

[It is in God, as reconciled to us in Christ Jesus, that this blessedness is to be found. To those who seek him not in Christ Jesus, God himself is only "a consuming fire:" but to his believing people he is "a very present help," and "an eternal great reward."]

^d 2 Cor. i. 5.

DCLX.

DEVOTION TO GOD RECOMMENDED AND ENFORCED.

Ps. xcvi. 6—11. *O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness; when your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my work. Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways; unto whom I swear in my wrath, that they should not enter into my rest.*

IN the former part of this psalm, the Jewish people, for whom it was composed, mutually exhorted each other: in the latter part, God himself is the speaker: and the manner in which this latter part is

cited in the Epistle to the Hebrews, shews, that the whole psalm is as proper for the use of the Christian, as it was of the Jewish, Church. The peculiar circumstance of its consisting of a mutual exhortation is there expressly noticed: and noticed with particular approbation: "*Exhort one another daily*, while it is called To-day^a." This hint the Compilers of our Liturgy attended to, when they appointed this psalm to be read constantly in the Morning Service, as introductory to the other psalms that should come in rotation: and, as being so appointed, it deserves from us a more than ordinary attention.

In discoursing upon it, we shall notice,

I. The exhortation—

[The proper object of our worship is here described. As addressed to the Jews, the terms here used would fix their attention on Jehovah, as contra-distinguished from all false gods: but, as addressed to Christians, they lead our minds to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is "God with us," even "God over all, blessed for evermore." HE is our *Maker*; for "by him were all things created, both which are in heaven and in earth^b." He is "the good Shepherd, who laid down his life for his sheep," and who watches over them, and preserves them day and night^c. — — — HIM then we must worship with all humility of mind, "bowing down, and kneeling before him." At his hands must we seek for mercy, even through his all-atoning sacrifice — — — and from him, as our living Head, must we look for all necessary supplies of grace and peace — — —

O come, let us thus approach him! let us do it not merely in the public services of our Church, but in our secret chambers; and not occasionally only, but constantly; having all our dependence upon him, and all our expectations from him.]

That this exhortation may not be in vain, we entreat you to consider,

II. The warning with which it is enforced—

[The Jews who, in the wilderness, disobeyed the heavenly call, were never suffered to enter into the land of Canaan. In the judgments inflicted upon them, they are held forth as a warning to us^d. Like them, we have seen all the wonders of God's love, in delivering us from a far sorer than Egyptian

^a Heb. iii. 13.

^b John i. 3.

^c John x. 11. Heb. xiii. 20. Ezek. xxxiv. 11—16.

^d 1 Cor. x. 1—11.

bondage. Like them, we have had spiritual food administered to us in rich abundance in the Gospel of Christ. And if, like them, we harden our hearts, and rebel against our God, like them, we must be excluded from the heavenly Canaan. They by their obstinacy provoked God to exclude them with an oath: O that we may never provoke him to “swear that we also shall never enter into his rest!” That we are in danger of bringing this awful judgment on ourselves is evident from the intimation given us by the Apostle Jude^e, and yet more plainly from the warnings which St. Paul founds on this very passage^f — — — Let us then “hear the voice” of our good Shepherd, ere it be too late. Let us “grieve him” no longer — — — but let us turn to him with our whole hearts — — — Caleb and Joshua were admitted into Canaan, because “they followed the Lord fully:” let us follow him fully, and we shall certainly attain the promised rest.]

After the example of St. Paul, we would with all earnestness *caution* you against,

1. Unbelief—

[The Jews believed neither the promises nor the threatenings of God, and therefore they perished. Let us beware lest we fall after the same example of unbelief^g. If we will not believe that we stand in need of mercy to the extent that God has declared, or that the service of God is so reasonable and blessed as he has represented it to be, or that the judgments of God shall infallibly come on all who refuse to serve him, there is no hope: we must perish, notwithstanding all the offers of mercy that are sent to us: for “the word preached cannot profit us, if it be not mixed with faith in them that hear it^h.”]

2. Hardness of heart—

[As Israel hardened themselves against God when his messages were sent them by Moses, so do many now harden themselves against the word preached by the ministers of Christ. They “puff at” all the judgments denounced against themⁱ. But “who ever hardened himself against God, and prospered?” O! “will your hearts be stout in the day that HE shall deal with you? and will you thunder with a voice like his?” Be persuaded: humble yourselves before him, yea, “bow down and kneel before him,” and never cease to cry for mercy, till he has turned away his anger, and spoken peace to your souls.]

3. Delay—

[“To-day,” says the Psalmist: “To-day, while it is called To-day,” says the Apostle Paul: and “To-day,” would I say:

^e ver. 5.

^f Heb. iii. 7—19. and iv. 1. ^g Heb. iv. 12.

^h Heb. iv. 2.

ⁱ Ps. x. 4, 5.

yes, Brethren, “to-day” “harden not your hearts;” for you know not what a day may bring forth. Before another day, you may be taken into the eternal world; or, if not, you may provoke God to swear in his wrath, that you shall never enter into his rest; and then your remaining days will answer no other end, than to fill up the measure of your iniquities. But surely you have grieved him long enough already; some of you twenty, some thirty, some perhaps even “forty years.” Let there be an end of this rebellion against your Maker and your Redeemer; and let this, which is with him the day of grace, be to you “the day of salvation.”]

DCLXI.

THE DUTY OF MAKING CHRIST KNOWN TO THE HEATHEN.

Ps. xcvi. 1—3. *O sing unto the Lord a new song; sing unto the Lord all the earth. Sing unto the Lord; bless his name: shew forth his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the heathen, his wonders among all people.*

TO any one who looks even in the most superficial manner into the Holy Scriptures, there must appear a very wide difference between the experience of the saints recorded there, and that which is found amongst persons reputed saints in the present day. The Saviour himself is not so much the object of holy glorying, as he was amongst some, who looked forward to him at the distance of a thousand years; nor are the same elevated affections towards him brought into exercise, as were displayed by them. A man who should now exclaim, as David did, “*O sing unto the Lord a new song; sing unto the Lord, all the earth: sing unto the Lord; bless his name; shew forth his salvation from day to day!*” he, I say, would be accounted an enthusiast at least; and it would be well if he were not characterized by a yet harsher term. But religion is, or ought to be, the same in all ages; except indeed that our views of Christ should be more elevated, and our delight in him be more ardent, in proportion as our means of knowing him are more ample, and our motives to love him more enlarged. The psalm before us undoubtedly refers to him; for it speaks expressly of the publication of his Gospel to the Gentile world. It is

indeed only a part of a psalm written originally by David at the time of his bringing up the ark to Mount Zion from the house of Obed-edom^a: and this part was selected afterwards for the constant use of the Church, as being calculated to keep up in the minds of men an expectation of the Messiah, and to prepare their hearts for the reception of him.

In discoursing on that portion of it which we have read, we shall,

I. Point out your duty to the Lord Jesus Christ—

In speaking to persons who profess to derive all their hopes of salvation from the Lord Jesus, methinks it is scarcely necessary to say, that,

1. We should praise him ourselves—

[We should not be content to acknowledge him in words; we should feel towards him in deed, as our “All in all^b.” These feelings we should express in songs of praise: or if we be silent as to our voice, we should at least “make melody to him in our hearts;” “blessing” and adoring him from our inmost souls.

We should sing to him “a *new* song.” It was so called by David, because it was a song that was to be sung especially at the introduction of the Christian dispensation, the events predicted and shadowed forth being then fulfilled. But it is still a *new* song to all who sing it; because in their unconverted state they have no disposition, no ability to sing it: “they cannot, *in that sense*, say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost^c.” Moreover, it will to all eternity continue *new*; fresh discoveries of his glory being ever manifested to the soul, and fresh energies supplied for the celebration of his praise. Hence in heaven itself the songs of all the glorified saints are thus designated: “they sing unto the Lord a *new* song^d.” Thus “from day to day” *our* harps should be tuned afresh, and our praises ascend to heaven with every breath we draw.]

2. We should make him known to others—

[Who that had ever tasted of the blessings of salvation would “eat his morsel alone?” who would not wish all the world to partake with him? Yes surely, we should declare his glory among the heathen, and his wonders among all people.” O what “wonders” of love and mercy have we to proclaim! Who can reflect on the person of our “Emmanuel, who is God with us,” leaving the bosom of his Father, taking our nature, bearing our sins, and effecting by his obedience unto death our

^a 1 Chron. xvi. 7—36.

^b 1 John iii. 18.

^c 1 Cor. xii. 3.

^d Rev. v. 9. and xiv. 3.

reconciliation with God; who, I say, can reflect on this, and not desire to make it known to all the sinners of mankind? In a word, who can have beheld “the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ,” and not desire to reflect the light of it on all who are sitting in darkness and the shadow of death? This is undoubtedly our duty: we are not to put our light under a bushel, but to set it on a candlestick, that all the world, if possible, may see the light.]

This then being our duty to the Lord Jesus Christ, we will proceed to,

II. Call you to the performance of it—

Consider,

1. Your obligations to the Lord Jesus Christ—

[How inconceivably great are these! If we attempt to estimate them, where shall we begin? or, having begun, where shall we end? If you have not yet experienced his converting grace, the very provision of a salvation for you, a salvation so dearly bought, and so freely offered, demands from you every tribute of love and gratitude that you can ever pay. But if you have reason to think yourselves partakers of this salvation, and are enabled with appropriating faith to say, “He has loved *me*, and given himself for *me*,” there should be no bounds to your zeal and diligence in his service. Time, talents, property, yea life itself, should be esteemed by you as of no value, any farther than they may enable you to glorify his name. Enter then minutely into the consideration of this subject, and say, Whether, “if *you* hold your peace, the very stones will not cry out against you?”]

2. The necessities of the heathen world—

[The whole Scriptures speak of the heathen world as perishing for lack of knowledge: and though we will not presume to say, that none of them shall be made partakers of God’s mercy for Christ’s sake; yet we are sure, that, as a body, they are under a sentence of guilt and condemnation. Can we then know the remedy which God has provided for them, and not feel ourselves bound to reveal it to them, and to labour, as far as possible, to extend to them its saving benefits? Can we reflect on the unhappy state of the Jews, and not pity them; blinded as they are by prejudice, and bent as they are on their own destruction? Can we look on all the different classes of the Gentile world, and see what penances they endure to pacify the supposed wrath of their senseless idols, and not feel a desire to proclaim to them the glad tidings of the Gospel? If it would be our duty to stretch out our hand to one sinking in the waters, and to rescue him from destruction,

much more is it our duty to exert ourselves to the utmost of our power for the preservation of a ruined world.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are lukewarm in the cause of Christ—

[Many are so afraid of enthusiasm, that they banish from their minds all that may subject them to such an imputation. Hence, whilst they are correct and accurate in their principles, they are grievously defective in the sublimer parts of practical religion: they have a form of godliness, but no experience of its power. But let such persons know that the Lord Jesus Christ is more displeased with the lukewarmness of those who profess themselves his friends, than he is with the neglect of his avowed enemies^e. If from our inmost souls we love him not, he denounces a solemn curse against us^f: and if we serve him not with the talents entrusted to our care, he will require them at our hands, and punish us severely for our abuse of them.^g]

2. Those who are active in his service—

[God forbid that we should ever speak a word to discourage activity in the service of our Lord. But it is certain that many are diligent in doing what they suppose to be his will, who yet are far from cultivating that spirit which he will approve. Pride, ostentation, and a variety of other corrupt motives, may stimulate men to exertion; whilst humility and modesty, and all the lovelier graces of the Spirit, are wanting in them. Look to it then, that your love and zeal be duly tempered with reverence and godly fear. At the same time, take care that you do not become weary in well-doing. Be on your guard that your love to the Saviour languish not, and that your endeavours to convert others to the knowledge of him be not relaxed. Try amongst your friends and neighbours to interest them in his salvation. Then extend your efforts to all, whether Jews or Gentiles: and “count not even life itself dear to you,” if that you may but glorify him, and save the souls of your perishing fellow-creatures.]

^e Rev. iii. 15, 16.

^f 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

^g Matt. xxvi. 20.

DCLXII.

WORSHIP IN THE BEAUTY OF HOLINESS.

Ps. xcvi. 9. *O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness!*

THE calling of the Gentiles was a very favourite subject with the sweet singer of Israel. It is almost always blended with his sweetest strains. If at any time his soul be inflamed with more than ordinary

devotion, it expands itself immediately to the remotest corners of the earth, and anticipates the period when the whole world shall enjoy the privileges which were then confined within the narrow limits of the Jewish nation; yea rather, when the richer blessings of Messiah's reign should be diffused with equal liberality over the face of the whole earth. The psalm before us had a special reference to the Messiah. It speaks of "a *new* song" that was to be sung; a song unknown to Moses, who celebrated only a temporal deliverance: and it was to be sung by "the *whole earth*," because it was to be commemorative of a spiritual and eternal redemption, wrought out by the Messiah for the whole family of man. Let us read a part of this sublime composition: "O sing unto the Lord a *new* song! sing unto the Lord *all the whole earth*. Sing unto the Lord; bless his name; shew forth *his salvation* from day to day. Declare his glory *among the Heathen*, his wonders among *all people*. Give unto the Lord, *O ye kindreds of the people*, give unto the Lord glory and strength. O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness! fear before him, *all the earth*. Say among *the Heathen* that the Lord reigneth^a." That it is of the Messiah's advent and reign that he here speaks, is evident; because he refers, not to any thing past, but to events yet future: "Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof: let the field be joyful, and all that is therein: then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice before the Lord: for *He cometh*; for *he cometh to judge* (to rule) *the earth*: he shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth^b."

This psalm, together with a part of the 105th, was used by David, when he carried up the ark to Mount Zion, to place it in *the Tabernacle*^c: and well was it adapted to that occasion; because the ark was a very eminent type of that adorable "word, who in due time became flesh, and *dwelt* amongst us^d." *Then*,

^a ver. 1—3, 7, 9, 10.

^b ver. 11—13.

^c 1 Chron. xvi. 7—33.

^d John i. 14. ἐσκήνωσεν.

even at the hour when we might have supposed that the interests of his own subjects would have an exclusive possession of his mind, did David contemplate the welfare of the Gentiles, and call on them to “worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness^e.”

We shall consider these words as containing,

I. An invitation to the whole Gentile world—

By “the beauty of holiness,” I understand the Sanctuary of the Lord—

[As the tabernacle and all its furniture were of the most costly materials and the most exquisite workmanship, so was the temple and all that it contained; and especially every thing connected with the holy of holies. But though in this respect it exceeded every thing upon earth in “beauty,” there was a far higher reason for its being called by this peculiar name: it was the immediate residence of the Deity, who dwelt there in a bright cloud, the Shechinah, the visible symbol of his presence. The heaven of heavens was not more holy than that sacred chamber, nor more beauteous: and therefore it might well be called, not beautiful, but “beauty;” not holy, but “holiness” in the abstract, or more forcibly still, “The beauty of holiness,” in comparison of which there was nothing beautiful or holy upon the face of the whole earth.]

Thither David invites the whole Gentile world to come, and “worship the Lord,” the Creator, the Governor, the Saviour of the world—

[By the Law of Moses it was forbidden them to enter into any part of the sanctuary. For them an outer court was provided, beyond which they were forbidden, on pain of death, to proceed. But, through the coming of the Messiah, “the partition-wall was to be broken down:” and all, both Jews and Gentiles, were to be incorporated into one body, and to be made partakers of the same privileges^f. Even the vail of the temple itself was to be rent in twain^g, and “a new and living way be opened” for every child of man^h, to approach for himself the very mercy-seat of the Most High, and to offer there his sacrifices of prayer and praise, and his incense too of fervent intercession. To this does David here invite the Gentile world. Not David himself would have dared to enter into the sanctuary which was then standing: into “the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High” it would have been at the peril of his life to enter: but he foresaw, that that servile dispensation was in due time

^e 1 Chron. xvi. 29.

^f Eph. ii. 14—16.

^g Matt. xxvii. 51.

^h Heb. x. 19—22.

to pass away; and that God would then hold out to every man, whether Jew or Gentile, whether bond or free, the golden sceptre of his grace, with free permission to make known to him his every request, even to the half, or to the whole, of his kingdom. To the Gentiles therefore he calls, to “turn from their idols to serve the living God,” and to “glorify God with their bodies and their spirits, which are his.”]

Let us next consider the words as,

II. A special call to us—

“The beauty of holiness” is yet standing—

[The tabernacle and the temple are indeed long since swept away; nor is there in existence a vessel that belonged to either. But, if the symbol of God’s presence is removed, is God himself therefore gone? No: he is here, in this very place, as truly as ever he was in his sanctuary of old. He has said, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world.” And have we not also a sacrifice wherewith we may approach him? Yes, we have a sacrifice of infinitely greater value than all the cattle on a thousand hills. “The sacrifice of his dear Son is to him of a sweet-smelling savour:” and the merit of that every one of us may plead, and plead too with an infallible certainty of acceptance. What was there in the temple of old which *we* do not possess? Not any thing; not any thing which we do not possess to infinitely greater advantage. The Jews had the shadow; we have the substance: and what we enjoy as far excels in beauty and in holiness all that they possessed, as a living body excels a reflection of it in a glass.]

And may I not add, that “the beauty of holiness” is more especially visible in the ordinances of the Established Church?

[I mean not to speak disrespectfully of any other body of Christians whatever, or to detract from their ordinances, however administered: but I must say, and I say it from my inmost soul, that, in my judgment, there is in the worship of the Church of England a beauty and a holiness superior to what is found in any other Church upon earth.

But, not to enter into invidious comparisons, or to diminish the respect which others have for their own peculiar modes of worship, let us confine our attention to the worship of that Church whereof we are members. If the principles on which our worship is founded are any tests of excellence, verily our Church stands most conspicuous for all that is beautiful and holy. The Scriptures themselves are the one standard which she follows. Disdaining the trammels of human systems, she

comprehends in her views all that the Scripture utters, without attempting to wrest or pervert any truth which may bear an aspect uncongenial with the dictates of unenlightened reason. It is not possible for the creature to be more deeply humbled, than her worshippers are when confessing their sins before God. And so fervent are her petitions, that nothing can exceed them. Nor is there a petition offered, which is not presented in the name of Jesus Christ, so entire is the dependence which all her children place in the merits and mediation of that adorable Saviour. Her praises and thanksgivings are as ardent as any that words can express. So that, if a whole congregation in one of our churches entered fully into the spirit of our Liturgy, it would be a brighter resemblance of heaven than was ever yet seen upon the face of the globe.]

Let me, then, call you, as David does, to “worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness”—

[“Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name: bring an offering: come into his courts¹:” and take care that your worship be such as becomes his sanctuary. Let a holy reverential awe fill your souls, whenever you draw nigh to God. Let your confessions be humble; your supplications, fervent; your thanksgivings, devout. Have a special view to the Lord Jesus Christ throughout the whole of the service; and think not to offer any thing to God, or to receive any thing from God, but through *him*, as your all-prevailing Friend and Mediator. Whether you approach God in your closet, or in the public assembly, watch over your spirit in relation to these things, and presume not to offer unto God the sacrifice of fools. Let not the consideration of your natural distance from God discourage you. Remember, that the invitation is given to the remotest Gentiles, who are bowing down to the works of their own hands, which can never profit or deliver. To you, therefore, whatever be your state, is the invitation sent: and we are authorised, by God himself, to declare, that of those who come to him in his Son’s name, “not so much as one shall ever be cast out.”]

ADDRESS—

1. Make a due improvement of your own privileges—

[You cannot but see how highly David and his people were privileged above the benighted Heathen: yet were their blessings but a faint shadow of yours; so much more distinct is your knowledge of God, and so much nearer is your access to him. Not any but the High Priest could enter into the Holy of Holies; and he only on one day in the year: but of you, every individual may go to the very throne of the Divine Majesty, and *that* too every day and every hour of your lives. You are

¹ ver. 8.

“a kingdom of priests,” and may take the blood of your great sacrifice, and sprinkle it with acceptance on the Mercy-seat of your God. O that you might learn to estimate aright your high privilege, and improve it daily to the everlasting benefit of your souls!]

2. Endeavour to extend them to the whole world—

[We should not be content to serve our God alone: we should wish him to be honoured and enjoyed by every child of man: and to advance his glory in the world should be an object of our most unwearied attention. Happily for us, there are Societies that have embarked in this blessed work, and through which every individual may contribute to the enlargement of the Redeemer’s kingdom^k — — — And view the field, how extended it is! “The field is the world.” Arise, my Brethren, to the work that is before you: and if you cannot effect all that you could wish, let it at least be said of you by the heart-searching God, “They have done what they could.”]

^k Here the particular Society, such as the SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE, the BIBLE SOCIETY, or the PRAYER-BOOK AND HOMILY SOCIETY, may be set forth, and its objects and operations may be detailed.

DCLXIII.

GOD’S WAYS DARK, BUT JUST.

Ps. xcvi. 2. *Clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne.*

THE reign of Christ is here spoken of, as a ground of joy to the whole world: “The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice: let the multitude of isles be glad thereof.” That CHRIST is the person to whom the psalm refers, we are assured on infallible authority; for, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, we are told that the injunction, “Worship HIM, all ye gods!” was given by the Father in reference to him: “When He (the Father) bringeth in the First-begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him^a.” As to the particular advent of our Lord, I conceive that, in the psalm before us, the period alluded to is that in which our Lord came to conduct the Hebrew nation through the wilderness to the Promised Land. “He came down with thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud,” in exact

^a Compare ver. 7. with Heb. i. 6.

accordance with the description given of him in this psalm^b. At the precise period of his incarnation there were no such signs; though at his death and resurrection, which may properly be included in that period, there were similar demonstrations of his Divine Majesty: and at his future advent we are assured he will “come in power and great glory,” such as that with which he was attended at the time of his ascension to the right hand of God^c. But it is not to any one of these periods that I shall confine my attention; because the language of my text is general, and may well be considered as referring to all periods and to all events: for there is no one part of the divine government to which it may not be well applied, every act of it being involved in impenetrable obscurity, yet founded in wisdom, and goodness, and truth, and equity.

In unfolding, then, the truth contained in my text, I will endeavour to illustrate it,

I. In the dispensations of God's providence—

Survey the state of the whole world since the fall of man—

[See the state in which every child is born into the world; how “shapen in iniquity,” how altogether unlike to man in his original creation^d! — — See, too, as they grow up to maturity and put forth their powers, what wickedness they commit, and what misery they spread around them, none being a greater enemy to man than man himself!

Behold the brute creation: these, though incapable of sin, feel bitterly its penal consequences, and shew, beyond a possibility of doubt, that they inherit qualities which they did not originally possess; being hostile to each other, and in many instances the common enemies of man. The very earth itself also partakes of the curse due to sin; and all the elements are armed against the human race, to inflict on them, as God shall appoint, the destruction they have merited.

I ask, then, Are not “clouds and darkness round about that God by whose ordinance these things exist? Can any one give a satisfactory explanation of them all, or even of any one of them? Yet we are sure that “righteousness and judgment are the habitation (the *basis*) of them all.” For whether we

^b Compare ver. 2—5. with Exod. xix. 11, 16.

^c Acts i. 11. with Luke xxi. 27. ^d Ps. li. 5. Eph. ii. 3.

understand his ways or not, "his work is perfect, and all his ways are judgment: a God of truth, and without iniquity; just and right is he^e."]]

Mark also his dealings with the individuals of mankind—

[What an amazing disparity do we find amongst the children of men; some endued with great mental powers, whilst others, from their very birth, through a want of intellectual capacity, are in a state more helpless and degraded than the beasts themselves; some possessing all the comforts of health, and others protracting a miserable existence, from which, at any moment, death would be a merciful relief! some destitute of the most common necessities of life, whilst others revel in every species of luxurious abundance! To what can we trace this vast diversity; or, if we attempt to account for it on the common principles of equity, what shall we say? Surely "clouds and darkness are round about it" all; and faith is left to supply the deficiencies of reason. We know that God cannot err, and that "all his ways are both mercy and truth." His "way, indeed, is in the sea, and his footsteps are not known^f:" but "his righteousness is like the great mountains, though his judgments are a great deep^g."]]

Inscrutable depths also will be found,

II. In the revelation of his grace—

Here the difficulties are greater still. Consider,

I. The revelation itself—

[What a mystery is here! the substitution of God's co-equal, co-eternal Son in the place of his own sinful and rebellious creatures; "the Holy One and the Just, in the place of the unholy and unjust^h!" or rather, if I might venture to use such an expression, I should almost say, The death of an incarnate God, in the place and for the sake of incarnate devils! You remember what our blessed Lord himself said, even to those who called themselves the Lord's people: "Ye are of your father the devil; and the lusts of your father ye will doⁱ." Yet for such did Jesus die, even for the chief of sinners. Tell me, Are there not "clouds and darkness" here? Yet I hesitate not to say, that "righteousness" pervades it all; and "judgment," such as shall finally approve itself to the whole intelligent creation, is the basis of it. In fact, it is this which, above all other things in the whole universe, displays the righteousness of God, who, by exacting such a sacrifice, then most of all shews himself just, when he justifies those who believe in his dear Son^k.]

^e Deut. xxxii. 4.

^f Ps. lxxvii. 19.

^g Ps. xxxvi. 6.

^h 1 Pet. iii. 18.

ⁱ John viii. 44.

^k Rom. iii. 25 26.

2. The objects selected to enjoy its benefits—

[The great mass of mankind, from the Deluge to the time of Abraham, were left in darkness, insomuch that the knowledge of the true God had nearly vanished from the earth. And then was God pleased to fix on Abraham, an idolater in the midst of an idolatrous family and nation, and to reveal his covenant to *him*. To Isaac also, in preference to Ishmael his elder child; and to Jacob also, in preference to Esau, was it given to be comprehended in this covenant; yea, given whilst both of them were yet in the womb, and consequently before they had done either good or evil. Let any one explain this, or account for it in any other way than that suggested by our Lord: “Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.” The same sovereignty appears at this hour, in choosing the poor, the weak, the vile, in preference, for the most part, to the rich, the great, the moral: for it is found, in ten thousand instances, that “publicans and harlots enter into the kingdom before the specious and self-righteous Pharisees.” The man who sees no mystery here, only betrays his own ignorance and stupidity. A man with ever so contracted a view of this subject, must of necessity exclaim, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!”]

3. The trials to which the elect are subjected, in their way to heaven—

[One would suppose that God's chosen people should be freed from the persecutions of men, the assaults of devils, the temptations of sin, and from all which might endanger their salvation: but God sees fit to give both to men and devils a kind of licence to assault his people; as it is said, “Ye wrestle not with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness in high places^m.” One would suppose that those whom he has redeemed with the blood of his only dear Son should be free from these things: but, on the contrary, he says, “If ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.” One would suppose at least, that from their conversion to God they should be freed from the corruptions of their nature and the power of the evil principle within them. But far different are his dealings with them; and through much tribulation he brings almost every one of them to glory. In all these things he is “both wise and good:” and, however intricate or circuitous the way may be whereby he leads his people to glory, it will be found at last to have been “*the right way*”ⁿ; the right way for their benefit, and the right way also for the honour of his own great name.]

^l Rom. xi. 33.

^m Eph. vi. 12.

ⁿ Ps. cvii. 7.

Let us yet further contemplate the inscrutableness of God's ways,

III. In the final issue of all things—

How tremendous will be the difference between the states of different men!

[View heaven and all its glory, and hell with all its misery; and consider that both the one and the other will be eternal: and then consider how short the period of time is in which any man is preparing for the one or the other of these states; and how small the distance between their real characters, if estimated by the common standard of the world — — — Above all, contemplate the youth, who thought he had fulfilled the whole Law from his earliest youth, cast out; and the dying thief, who spent his whole life, even to his latest hour, in sin, exalted to glory!]

Is there nothing mysterious in this?

[Truly, we must acknowledge that these things utterly pass all human comprehension. We are sure that "the Judge of all will do right," and that the day of judgment is especially appointed "for the revelation of the righteous judgment of God:" but we must wait till he shall be pleased to throw the true light upon his own mysterious ways, and to take the veil from our hearts, that we may be able to comprehend them.]

Surely from this subject we may LEARN,

1. Submission—

[Your trials, I will suppose, are great. But are they greater than your desert of punishment? — — — or do you know all the gracious designs which God has to accomplish by them? — — — "Be still, then, and know that he is God:" and, under the most grievous affliction that can come upon you, learn to say, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good" — — —]

2. Gratitude—

[Look back upon the ways of God; and, however you may have been disposed at the time to say, "All these things are against me," say whether you have not found that he has brought good out of evil, and given you reason to acknowledge, that his judgments were mercies in disguise? Were you left to yourselves, you would choose nothing but what should be pleasing to flesh and blood: but God consults your best interests, and deals with you, not according to your wishes, but according to your necessities. Be thankful then to him, for having acted towards you as a wise and loving parent, who has withheld nothing that was good for you: and if at any time he have

° Rom. ii. 5.

inflicted chastisement upon you, he “has done it for your profit, that you might be partakers of his holiness,” and be rendered meet for his glory.]

3. Affiance—

[You know not what is before you: but you know that you are in God’s hands, and that “not a hair can fall from your head” but by his special appointment. Look then to him, to order every thing for you: and if you understand not his dealings with you, be content to say, ‘What I know not now, I shall know hereafter.’ Never for a moment doubt his power or grace. He has promised to “make all things work together for your good:” and therefore, under the darkest dispensation, assure yourselves that “He is doing all things well;” and determine, through grace, to say with Job, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.”]

DCLXIV.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE RIGHTEOUS.

Ps. xcvi. 11. *Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart.*

THIS psalm, whatever was the particular occasion on which it was written, undoubtedly refers to the kingdom of the Messiah, in which the whole creation has abundant reason to rejoice^a. To him it is expressly applied in the Epistle to the Hebrews, even to his incarnation: “When Jehovah bringeth in the First-begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him^b.” But it is not to rejoice in him merely that the saints are called: they are to love him, to serve him, to honour him, to trust in him, and to expect at his hands the blessedness which he himself, in his exalted state, enjoys. He suffered indeed before he entered into his glory; and so likewise must they: but, for their consolation under their sufferings, let them know that joy is treasured up for them: for “light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart:” and, if only they maintain their integrity, they shall assuredly reap their reward.

In discoursing on these words, I shall open to you,

I. The character here described—

^a ver. 1.

^b Compare ver. 7. with Heb. i. 6.

Instead of entering into a general description of "the righteous," I shall take that particular representation here given of them, "the upright in heart:" for this is peculiar to the righteous, and to them alone; and at the same time there is not a righteous person in the universe whom it does not accurately depict.

Now, uprightness of heart necessarily includes,

1. A mind open to the reception of truth—

[The mind of a natural man is closed against divine truth: he hates the light, and will not come to it: and if it be obtruded upon him, he shuts his eyes against it, lest it should discover to him his corruptions. But a man that is upright in heart will come to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest. He desires to know the whole mind of God; and is as thankful for the light which opens to him his sins, as for that which brings to his view the Saviour of the world. He is conscious that there is a film upon his eyes: but he begs of God to remove it: he is sensible that, through the weakness of his vision, the very light itself will blind him: and therefore he entreats of God to send his Holy Spirit into his soul, to "open the eyes of his understanding," and to "guide him into all truth." Whilst "his eye was evil, he was in total darkness:" but having attained "a single eye, his whole body is full of light^c."]

2. A will determined to follow the truth as far as it is discovered—

[He complains of no doctrine as "an hard saying," nor of any "commandment as grievous." When he goes to the Lord for instruction, he says with Paul, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" "Only declare to me thy blessed will, and I am ready, and determined, through grace, to execute it." As to consequences, he will not regard them. What is duty? will be his only inquiry. He will expect to have his conduct disapproved by an ignorant ungodly world; but "he confers not with flesh and blood." It is a settled principle in his mind, "If I please men, I cannot be a servant of Jesus Christ^d." He will give his whole soul to God, to "be poured into the mould of the Gospel," and to be employed in "magnifying the Lord, whether by life or death^e."]]

3. A conscience faithfully inspecting the whole conduct, and bringing it to the test of God's word—

[Conscience in the natural man is partial. Indeed, in multitudes who profess religion, it is far from being a faithful monitor: it will deny in practice what it admits in principle,

^c Matt. vi. 22, 23.

^d Gal. i. 10.

^e Phil. i. 20.

and allow in ourselves what it condemns in others. But where the heart is truly upright, conscience will act, not according to any selfish views or principles, but with strict equity, according to the unerring standard of the Gospel. This is essential to real integrity: and, when God has “put truth in our inward parts,” and “renewed a *right spirit* within us,” such will assuredly be the effects: conscience will be a light within us: it will be like a compass, that will guide us in the darkest night: it will be God’s vicegerent in the soul, acquitting or condemning according to truth, even as God himself will do in the day of judgment. It will summon the whole man to give account of himself from day to day: it will cause all the actions, words, and thoughts to pass in review before it: in short, it will suffer no disposition, no habit, no inclination, to exist in the soul, without comparing it with the written word, and having reason to believe that it will be approved of the Lord.]

4. A life in habitual accordance with these principles—

[After all, “the tree must be known by its fruit.” We can know nothing with certainty respecting the heart, but by the life. God sees it as it is in itself: we can discover it only by its acts. Behold then the upright man in his daily walk. See him searching with all humility the word of truth, and imploring direction from God, that he may understand it aright. Behold him giving up himself, in body, soul, and spirit, to the Lord from day to day; and rising, above all earthly considerations, to the contemplation and execution of God’s blessed will. Behold his searchings of heart also, and holy fear lest any hidden abomination should lurk within him. Hear him crying to God for his effectual aid: “Search me, O Lord, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting^f.” Then compare with this, his temper, his spirit, his conduct: and then you will see, though doubtless with manifold imperfections, “an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile.”]

Here is real uprightness of heart. Let us next contemplate,

II. The blessedness that awaits it—

A person possessed of this character will have much to bear—

[We greatly mistake if we think that such a person will be approved of all; or that he will have no trials within his own soul. No, indeed: he will, like Paul himself, have “fightings

^f Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24.

without and fears within." Much as such a character is admired in theory, it never is really exhibited before men without exciting great offence. From the days of Abel to the present moment, have "those who were born after the flesh hated and persecuted those who were born after the Spirit:" and for the most part has that been found true, that "the greatest foes have been those of a man's own household." If infallible wisdom, unbounded love, and sinless perfection could have obtained an exemption from the common lot, our blessed Lord would have passed without offence: but He, who was the most perfect of the human race, was pursued with more bitter acrimony than any other from the foundation of the world: and if they so hated him, they will hate us also: "if they called the Master of the house Beelzebub, much more will they those of his household."

In his own soul, too, the saint feels much to humble and to try him. He still has a carnal principle within him, and is only renewed in part: "the flesh still lusteth against the Spirit, so that he cannot do the things that he would." The Apostle Paul himself "groaned within himself, being burdened;" and, under a distressing sense of his in-dwelling corruptions, cried, "O wretched man that I am; who shall deliver me from this body of sin and death?" It may be, too, that he is assaulted with violent temptations, and that the fiery darts of Satan are permitted to pierce his soul. At such a season as this he may be ready to write bitter things against himself, and to call in question all that he has ever experienced of the grace of God.]

But, whatever be his trials, a happy issue of them most assuredly awaits him—

["Light and gladness are sown for him;" and, though he may wait long for the harvest, "he shall surely reap, if he faint not."

There is *in the purposes of God* a harvest of happiness secured to him. The trials of Joseph appeared, for a season, to defeat all the expectations which his dreams had excited; but they led, all of them in succession, to the accomplishment of his predestined elevation. Our blessed Lord, if viewed in the garden, on the cross, and in the grave, seemed to have been utterly defeated; but these were the forerunners of his glory: his resurrection soon changed the scene; his ascension speedily followed; and his sending of the Holy Spirit shewed, that all which had been ordained respecting him was fulfilled, and that he was invested with all power to save a ruined world. Thus shall God's purposes be accomplished in the final salvation of all his people. They may be tried, and sorely too, for a season: but they may adopt the language of the Church of old,

under her deepest afflictions, and say, "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me. I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness^g."

In the promises of God, also, is the same blessed issue secured. "If we suffer with Christ, God engages that we shall also reign with him," and "be glorified together." "The trial of our faith, from whatever quarter it may come, is precious, yea, more precious than gold itself; because it will be to our praise and honour and glory, as well as to the glory of our Lord and Saviour, in the great day of his appearing^h." Hear how fully our blessed Lord declared this to his weeping and disconsolate disciples: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful; but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow because her hour is come; but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again; and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from youⁱ." So our "weeping may endure for a night; but joy shall most assuredly come in the morning^k."

But even in the very experience of the upright is there a pledge of future glory. His tears are the seed of joy: and, "as surely as he goes on his way, bearing this precious *seed-basket*, so surely shall he come again with joy, bringing his sheaves with him." See this described, in its process, by St. Paul: "We glory in tribulation, knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed." Here tribulation is the seed; patience the blade; experience the ear; hope the full corn in the ear; and the completion of that hope in heaven, the ingathering of the harvest into the garner. In truth, "the light and momentary afflictions of the righteous actually work out for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

Thus is every upright soul rendered conformable to his Divine Master: he first "drinks of the brook in the way, and then, like him, has the happiness to lift up his head^l."]]

ADDRESS—

1. Seek real integrity—

[This is universally held in high estimation: at least, men universally profess so to regard it: and therefore, waving at

^g Mic. vii. 8, 9.

^h 1 Pet. i. 7.

ⁱ John xvi. 20—22.

^k Ps. xxx. 5.

^l Ps. cx. 7.

present all consideration of the peculiarities of religion, I say, seek an honest and an upright heart. Let your minds be open to the reception of truth, and your wills be determined to embrace it. Let conscience act its part, and execute the office of a faithful monitor within you; and let your lives be regulated altogether by its dictates. Let not prejudice or passion or interest blind you: let not the whole world cause you to swerve from the path of duty. Be bold for God; and “serve him, without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all your days.” In a word, “Quit yourselves like men,” and “be faithful unto death.” Like Moses, be ready to suffer affliction with the people of God; and in due season you shall, like him, receive an ample recompence of reward.]

2. Seek real happiness—

[This also is an object of universal desire. But be sure to seek it in the way in which alone it can be found. If you “sow iniquity, you can reap nothing but vanity:” if you “sow the wind, you must reap the whirlwind.” God has determined, that “whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap: he that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption: but he who soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting^m.” It is the harvest which repays the husbandman for all his labours. Look ye to *that*: and know, that “the sufferings of this present life, however great or numerous they may be, are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.” As for *appearances* of integrity, be not satisfied with *them*: *they* cannot but issue ill at the last. “Knowest thou not,” says Zophar, “since man was placed upon the earth, that the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment? Though his excellency mount up to the heavens, and his head reach unto the clouds, yet he shall perish for ever, like his own dung; and they that have seen him shall say, Where is he?” “Seek, then, the honour that cometh of God,” and the happiness that will endure. Then, when those who laughed now shall weep, you who wept now shall laugh and sing for joy to all eternity^o.]

^m Gal. vi. 7, 8.

ⁿ Job xx. 4—7.

^o Luke vi. 21, 25.

DCLXV.

CHRIST'S ADVENT A GROUND OF JOY.

Ps. xcvi. 1—9. *O sing unto the Lord a new song, for he hath done marvellous things: his right hand and his holy arm hath gotten him the victory. The Lord hath made known his salvation: his righteousness hath he openly shewed in the sight of the heathen. He hath remembered his mercy and his truth*

toward the house of Israel: all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all the earth: make a loud noise, and rejoice and sing praise. Sing unto the Lord with the harp; with the harp and the voice of a psalm. With trumpets and sound of cornet make a joyful noise before the Lord the King. Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. Let the floods clap their hands: let the hills be joyful together before the Lord: for he cometh to judge the earth: with righteousness shall he judge the world, and the people with equity.

THE Psalms are generally read as the effusions of a devout mind, whilst their reference to Christ is almost entirely overlooked. This, which is now under our consideration, like the 96th with which it accords, confessedly relates to Christ: the very language of verse 3, is used by Mary, Zacharias, and Simeon, in the divine hymns whereby they celebrated his advent in the flesh^a. It contains,

I. Some grounds and matter for our joy—

In the three first verses the Psalmist describes in figurative expressions, and in the last verse he expressly specifies, the proper ground of our joy.

The incarnation of Christ seems to be the subject here referred to—

[Christ is “the LORD” Jehovah, “the King” of kings, and Lord of lords, who “is come to judge the earth,” and to exercise dominion, not, like the judges of Israel, over one nation only, but over all the nations of the world. Nor under his government will any partiality be shewn either to Jews or Gentiles; on the contrary, it is administered “with perfect righteousness and equity:” his laws are *equally* binding on the rich and poor: his invitations are *equally* extended to the most abandoned sinner, and the most decent moralist: his benefits are *equally* conferred on all, according to their attainments in holiness; and his judgments will be inflicted with *equal* severity on the proudest monarch and the meanest beggar. With him is no respect of persons; and whatever difference he may put between one man and another in this life, he will manifest at last, that though clouds and darkness were round about him, righteousness and judgment were the basis of his throne.]

This is indeed a ground for the most exalted joy:

^a Luke i. 54, 55, 72. and ii, 30—32.

1. It is the most “marvellous” occurrence that ever the world beheld—

[That God should be manifested in human flesh, in order to redeem his enemies from destruction, and to purchase to himself a church with his own blood! great indeed is this mystery of godliness: it has heights and depths that can never be explored.]

2. It is the one mean of “victory” over death and hell—

[Satan, the god of this world, the prince of the power of the air, had usurped dominion over the whole race of man, which he would have retained for ever, if God himself had not interposed to rescue us from our sore bondage. But how should even God himself effect this great deliverance? No way was found, but for God himself to take our nature, and become our substitute. What joy then should not the execution of this plan excite in our hearts!]

3. It opens salvation to a ruined world—

[By this was “made known” the way of “righteousness and salvation” through a vicarious sacrifice: nor was it any longer set forth in types, but “*openly*,” in plain explicit declarations; and *that*, not to the house of Israel only, but “in the sight of the heathen.” How should *we* benighted Gentiles rejoice in this!]

4. It is the richest display of God’s “mercy and truth”—

[It was in this incomprehensible mystery that “mercy and truth” met together, and righteousness and peace kissed each other. When the incarnation of Christ was first promised to the world, it was a most stupendous act of *mercy*: after that, the accomplishment of it was an exhibition of *truth* and faithfulness: yea, it was virtually the substance of all the types, the completion of all the prophecies, the consummation of all the promises. Who must not rejoice in it?]

After stating such grounds for joy, we may add with confidence,

II. An exhortation to rejoice—

The animated exhortation of the Psalmist imports that,

1. We should feel an interest in this great event—

[It is by no means sufficient to acknowledge Christ in a mere speculative manner; we should consider ourselves as the subjects of his kingdom, and seek to participate the blessedness of his people. Let us then inquire, not merely whether we

believe that Christ came into the world, but whether we have been filled with wonder at his “marvellous” condescension? Let us ask ourselves whether “his right hand and his holy arm have gotten him the victory” over our rebellious hearts? Whether “he have made known” to *us* the sufficiency of “his righteousness,” and the excellency of “his salvation?” and whether “his mercy and truth” have been magnified in the forgiveness of our sins, and in our renovation after his divine image? All our pretences to joy will be vile hypocrisy, if we have not experienced, in some measure at least, these triumphs of his love, these victories of his grace.]

2. We should express our gratitude for it—

With frequency—

[It is not at one particular season only that we should call these things to remembrance, but frequently, yea, continually; since we every moment reap the benefits of Christ's administration. As the fire that burnt upon the altar was never suffered to go out, so neither should the flames of love and gratitude ever be extinguished in our hearts.]

With fervour—

[With what energy does the Psalmist repeat and diversify his exhortations to rejoice! Shall we then be contented to offer to our Lord a few cold and languid acknowledgments? No: we should make melody in our hearts unto him; we should even shout for joy. What if the world accuse us of enthusiasm? shall we relax the tone of Christian joy for *them*; or bring down the injunctions of heaven to the standard of *their* religion? Let the angels or glorified saints be blamed for carrying their exultations to excess, would they regard it, and compliment their accusers at the expense of duty? We plead not indeed for any thing that is extravagant and foolish; but if we can obtain more of heaven in our hearts, and manifest it more in our lives, let us not be afraid or ashamed to do it.]

With unanimity—

[The Psalmist calls, not only upon all the human race, but even upon the whole inanimate creation, to join in songs of praise and thanksgiving. And how lamentable is it that there should be found a creature upon earth, a rational and redeemed creature, that is indisposed for this exercise! O let us all be of one heart and mind: let us sing, rejoice, and give thanks: let our harps no longer be hung upon the willows, or struck in commendation of carnal joys; but let them be tuned in honour of our incarnate God; and let us celebrate upon them Messiah's praise. Thus shall even now our joy be unspeakable and glorified, a preparation for glory, an antepast of heaven.]

DCLXVI.

GENTILES CALLED TO GLORIFY GOD.

Ps. c. 1—5. *Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands. Serve the Lord with gladness: come before his presence with singing. Know ye that the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves: we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.*

IN discoursing upon short and insulated passages, we have scope for discussion upon whatever topic may come before us; but, in taking a whole psalm for our subject, we can do little more than mark the *spirit* of it, together with its *general import*. In truth, the psalm before us, which is entitled “A psalm of praise,” requires no particular discussion: it is merely a call to the whole world to render unto God the honour due unto his name. It is obviously addressed to the *Gentiles*, as much as to the Jews; and may therefore, as St. Paul informs us, be considered, not as an exhortation only, but as a *prophecy*, that, in due season, the Gentiles, even to the remotest ends of the earth, shall “see the salvation of God.”^a

That we may present the contents of the psalm before you in an orderly way, we would observe that we have in it,

I. A call to delight ourselves in God—

[We, as Gentiles, are particularly invited to engage in this blessed work. Religion is not a source of melancholy, but of sacred and exalted joy. At the commencement of the year of Jubilee, the trumpets sounded throughout all the land of Israel; and the joy which they diffused no words are adequate to express. The man who, from whatever cause, had parted with his possessions, and sold himself for a slave, was restored to perfect liberty, and to the full enjoyment of his paternal inheritance. What a surprising change to be wrought in one moment! and with what exquisite delight would it be welcomed, by those who for days and months and years had been waiting for it! Such “a joyful noise should we make unto the Lord,” as persons liberated from the most cruel

^a Rom. xv. 9—11.

bondage, and invested with all the blessings of an eternal inheritance — — — “From all other lords that have had dominion over us,” we should now turn to serve the Lord, even that adorable Saviour who has made us free; yea, we should “serve him with a willing heart^b,” “coming into his presence,” and walking constantly before him, as his redeemed people. Our sighs and tears should all be put away; and we should “sing unto the Lord a new song, as full of joy, for the marvellous things which he has done^c.” I mean not to say, that there should be no times for humiliation and contrition; for such seasons will be needed, even to our dying hour. But the more abiding frame of our minds should be joy; as it is said, “Rejoice evermore:” “Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, Rejoice.”]

We may next observe,

II. The grounds of this duty stated—

[The Lord whom we serve is no other than Jehovah, the only true God. Yes, though in his human nature he has died for us, in his divine nature he is the Most High over all, “God blessed for ever.” Prophets and Apostles bear ample testimony to this^d: “Know it,” therefore; and let it be treasured up in your minds as a ground of unutterable joy — — — And, whilst you contemplate his excellency, remember especially your obligations to him: “It is He who hath made us, and not we ourselves.” *As creatures* merely, it is unnecessary to say we have not made ourselves. It is in reference to our new creation, *as the people of God*, that these words must be understood; and in this sense they contain a most important truth. We suppose that you are become the people of God, and the sheep of his pasture. But who sought you out in your wanderings? Who brought you home to the fold of Christ? Who feeds you yet daily in green pastures? Who protects you from all your enemies? Who is the one source of all that you enjoy? Can it in any measure be ascribed to yourselves? Have you wrought it by any power of your own? or have you merited that it should be wrought for you? No: “He that hath wrought you to this self-same thing is God: and he has done it, not for your righteousness sake, but for the glory of his own great name.” It is “He who has made you to differ” from those who are yet far off from him; and “you have nothing, which you have not received” as a free gift from him^e.

Say, then, whether you have not reason to rejoice, and to “serve your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart^f.”]

As we proceed in the psalm, we find,

^b 1 Chron. xxviii. 9.

^c Ps. xcvi. 1.

^d Isai. xlv. 21, 22. Rom. ix. 5.

^e 1 Cor. iv. 7.

^f Deut. xxviii. 47.

III. A further statement of our duty—

[Whilst we are filled with joy, our God must have the glory. We must wait upon him in his public ordinances, as well as in our private chambers; and must “enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: we must be thankful unto him, and from our inmost souls must bless his holy name.” Indeed, if we duly contemplate his character, and the wonderful things which, of his sovereign goodness, he has wrought for us, we shall find our minds constantly attuned to this holy exercise: methinks, our every feeling will be gratitude, and our every word be praise. This is the return which our God looks for at our hands: “Whoso offereth me praise, glorifieth me.” It is a better sacrifice than all the cattle upon a thousand hills^g; and in the name of Jesus, our great Redeemer, we should be offering it continually, to the latest hour of our lives^h. The inanimate and the brute creation *praise* their God: but we should *bless* himⁱ.”]

We find also,

IV. Additional grounds for the performance of it—

[The perfections of our God will afford us matter for praise to all eternity. His *goodness*—who can contemplate it, and not be filled with the profoundest admiration and gratitude? It is seen, wherever we turn our eyes. But O! how is it seen in the gift of his only-begotten Son for a lost and perishing world! Well may we say, “What manner of love is this, wherewith the Father hath loved us!” Think of it, my Brethren: yea, dwell upon it day and night. It is not possible to have your minds too frequently or too intensely occupied with this mysterious subject.

His *mercy*, too—how inconceivable, both in its extent and duration! There is not a sinner in the universe to whom it will not reach, provided it be sought in God’s appointed way: nor shall it be withdrawn from any to whom, for Christ’s sake, it has been once imparted. Not but that God will punish sin: as he has said, “If his children forsake my Law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless, my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail; my covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips: for once have I sworn by my holiness, that I will not lie unto David^k.”

What His *mercy* has vouchsafed to promise, His *truth* will

^g Ps. l. 8—14, 23.

ⁱ Ps. cxlv. 10.

^h Heb. xiii. 15.

^k Ps. lxxxix. 30—35.

assuredly fulfil: it shall endure, in its full extent, to all generations; nor shall "a jot or tittle of it ever fail."

And now I ask, Is there not ground for praise and thanksgiving? Is it not rather a wonder that any who profess to be his people, can find time for any other employment?]

SEE, then, in this psalm,

1. What is the proper effect of religion upon the soul—

[Religion is supposed to generate gloom. But see it in the Psalmist's own experience; and see it in all whom he here addresses. Is this gloom or melancholy? Is it not the very reverse? Doubtless, as far as we *deviate from* religion, we have need to weep and mourn: but, in proportion as we *conform to it*, and imbibe its spirit, it will fill us with unutterable joy. What is it that the glorified saints are now doing in heaven? Are they not beholding all the glory of their God and Saviour, and singing his praise for all the wondrous works which he has done? This, then, is religion in perfection: and the privilege of God's people now is, to be assimilated to them, in mind, in spirit, in employment. Be aware of this, my beloved Brethren; and learn, not only to estimate religion aright, but to have it reigning in your hearts, and exemplified in your lives.]

2. How to attain it in perfection—

[It is not from ruminating on your own character, so much as from contemplating the character of your God and Saviour, that you are to attain this heavenly joy. Doubtless you must study well your own hearts; else you will be strangers to humility and contrition: but joy can flow only from the knowledge of your God, in all the perfections of his nature, and in all the wonders of his love. Behold then, with increasing earnestness, "the glory of your Lord, and you shall be changed into the same image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord."]

DCLXVII.

MERCY AND JUDGMENT GROUNDS OF PRAISE.

Ps. ci. 1. *I will sing of mercy and judgment: unto thee, O Lord, will I sing.*

THERE are many things in the Christian's experience, the precise quality of which he would find it difficult to determine, if they had not been recorded, as experienced by others, of whose piety we can have no doubt. To sing of mercy, and to *be resigned to judgment*, would appear to most Christians a suitable

expression of their feelings under the different dispensations. But David, in a review of his past life, and under circumstances as they existed at the time when he wrote this psalm, declared both mercy and judgment to be equally proper grounds for *praise* and *thanksgiving*; and the *repetition* of his determination to praise God for them shewed that he spake not inconsiderately, but the deliberate and determined purpose of his mind.

That we may be led to adopt the same pious determination, I will endeavour to set before you,

I. The dealings of God with his people—

We should naturally expect that God would act in a way of mercy only to his friends, and of judgment only to his enemies. But towards both the one and the other he sees fit to dispense a *mixed* lot, reserving the *unmixed* portion for the eternal world. The ungodly, whilst partakers of some judgments, certainly enjoy many mercies: and the godly, whilst abounding in mercies, are exposed also to some judgments.

Some they feel in common with the world at large—

[In their bodies, they are liable to pain, sickness, and death, even as others. In their minds, too, they may be afflicted with the loss of friends, with ill-treatment from enemies, with distress in their families, with embarrassment in their worldly circumstances. In these respects, one lot comes to all; nor can we discern God's love towards them by any thing of this outward nature^a.]

To some also they are subjected, that are peculiar to themselves—

[The ungodly are not, in general, sensible of any particular tokens of God's displeasure, as arising out of any variations of their conduct towards him: but the saints, who know what it is to have the light of his countenance lifted up upon them, are very keenly sensible of his withdrawal from them, when, by any secret neglects, they have provoked him to hide his face from them: and such frowns from their heavenly Father are inexpressibly painful to their soul^b — — — The temptations of Satan, too, to which the ungodly are, for the most part, utter strangers, are sometimes like fiery darts in the souls of the righteous. None can tell what "wrestlings" many a devout

^a Eccl. ix. 1.

^b Ps. lxxvii. 7—9. and lxxxviii. 14—16.

soul has “with the principalities and powers of hell:” but verily, those, whose lot it is to sustain them, find them a source of extreme pain at the time^c. Holy Job^d, and the Apostle Paul^e, yea, and our blessed Lord himself, complained bitterly under these trials^f; from which the vassals of Satan are exempt, and to which they only who are his determined enemies are exposed. Nor must I omit to mention the persecutions to which many are called to submit for righteousness sake. Those recorded in the 11th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews are amply sufficient to shew that they are not easy to be borne^g, nor altogether to be avoided, by any who will serve their God with fidelity and zeal^h. Of course, in respect of the *measure* of these trials, there will be found a great difference amongst the saints of God: but of *some* measure, all, in their season, are called to partecipate.]

But, mixed as these dispensations are, we are nevertheless prepared to contemplate,

II. The wisdom and goodness of God displayed in them—

Mercies may be sent to the ungodly in judgment; as when “God gave the Israelites their desires, but sent leanness withal into their soulsⁱ.” So, in like manner, to his own people he often sends judgment in mercy. In truth, so are we constituted in our present imperfect state, that we could not bear either mercies or judgments, if they came alone. Mercies, if unmixed, would “exalt us above measure^k,” and judgments, if unmixed, would sink us into despondency. A ship needs both sails and ballast, to carry it forward in safety: and so the Christian needs a diversity of dispensations, in order to accomplish in him the purposes of God’s grace. God sends them to his people,

1. To form them to the divine image—

[The divine image consists not in any one perfection, but in an assemblage of every perfection that can possibly be imagined. So the perfection of a Christian consists not in one grace, or even in one set of graces, but in a combination of all the graces which are suited to a redeemed soul, and calculated to advance the honour of our God. Now, all of these are formed

^c Eph. vi. 12, 16.

^d Job vi. 2—4.

^e 2 Cor. xii. 8.

^f Luke xxii. 44, 53.

^g Heb. xi. 36, 37.

^h 2 Tim. iii. 12.

ⁱ Ps. cvi. 15.

^k 2 Cor. xii. 7. twice mentioned in that one verse.

by that variety of dispensations of which we have been speaking. The workings of the soul under so many different circumstances will tend to shew a man what he really is, and consequently to humble him in the dust before God: whilst the dealings of God with him will wonderfully display the character of God himself, and lead forth the soul in the devoutest acknowledgments to him for past mercies, and in the most implicit confidence in him for future blessings. In a word, all the active and passive virtues will be generated in the soul, and be called forth into united and harmonious exercise; so that by these dispensations the Believer will be assimilated unto "God, who is light itself, and in whom is no darkness at all!"

2. To stimulate them in their way to glory—

[Mercies have a tendency to fill the soul with love to God, and to make it pant for the full enjoyment of God in heaven. Judgments also operate to the same end, by weaning the soul from present things, and causing it to long for that rest which remaineth for it in a better world. It was not peculiar to the Apostle Paul to "desire to depart, and to be with Christ." Every one who feels the vanity of earthly things, and has a foretaste of the world to come, will be like-minded with him. A weariness of life may be felt, and is often felt, by the most ungodly of men. *That*, therefore, is not the experience which I am speaking of: *that* results from a total ignorance of God's mercies, and a dissatisfaction with their appointed lot. The state of mind to which I refer, is well expressed by St. Paul, when he says, "We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burthened: *not that we would be unclothed*, but clothed upon, *that mortality may be swallowed up of life*." To the voice of Christ, saying, "Behold, I come quickly," it responds with joyful confidence; "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"]

Whilst they answer such ends as these, we cannot but see,

III. The light in which they should invariably be viewed—

The saints in every age have acknowledged the goodness of God in them—

[David, in my text, speaks of judgment, as well as mercy, as the ground of his devoutest acknowledgments. And he elsewhere not only declares that "it is good for him to have been afflicted^o," but traces his afflictions to the faithfulness of God^p; evidently intimating, that he regarded them as comprehended in the covenant of grace, and as promised, so far as

^l 1 John i. 5.

^m 2 Cor. v. 4.

ⁿ Rev. xxii. 20.

^o Ps. cxix. 71.

^p Ps. cxix. 75.

they should be needful for him, by a faithful and unchanging God. St. Paul even “took pleasure in them” in this view^a: and regarded them not only as light, but “as lightness itself;” from the consideration that they were “working out for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory^r.” The same experience also is ascribed to all the saints: for, of every true Christian it is said, “We glory in tribulations also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed^s.”]

And we also should be prepared to join in their anthems of praise—

[Our views of eternity should swallow up all inferior considerations; and that dispensation be most welcomed which most conduces to our eternal interests. To flesh and blood, that which is attended with present comfort appears best; but it is not really so. A wind that is somewhat cross will urge on a ship more steadily, and carry it forward more rapidly, than one which is quite direct; because it will fill all the sails. So a measure of adversity will operate more favourably on our Christian course, than a state of unmixed prosperity. Taken in connexion, the good and the evil mutually assist each other, and “work together for good unto all them that love God, and have been called by him according to his purpose^t.” Our blessed Lord himself “was made perfect through sufferings:” and what was subservient to his benefit, cannot fail of being conducive to ours also: and consequently, the acknowledgments which we should make respecting them in the eternal world should now at this time constitute an essential part of our thanksgivings to God.]

Who does not SEE here—

1. The value and importance of faith?

[Sense beholds things as they *appear*. Faith beholds them as they really *are*. Faith views them both in their *source* and *end*: it traces every thing to God, as the all-wise and infinitely gracious Disposer of all events. Faith comprehends that saying, “Is there evil in the city and *the Lord* hath not done it?” It fully accedes, also, to that inspired declaration, “Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.” Hence, if our mercies were unmixed, it would be far from regarding it as a token for good: it would rather suggest, that we were bastards and not sons; because there is no son whom a wise father chasteneth not^u. Learn then, my Brethren, to “walk by faith and not by sight^x.” You well know how greatly Jacob erred, when he said, “All these

^a 2 Cor. xii. 10.

^r 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18. The Greek.

^s Rom. v. 3—5.

^t Rom. viii. 28.

^u Heb. xii. 6—8.

^x 2 Cor. v. 7.

things are against me^y." In fact, the very events which he so much deplored, were the means which God had ordained for the preservation of himself and all his family. Job too, in the midst of all his trials, little thought in what they would issue. But "you have seen the end of *them*^z;" and if you will wait to see the Lord's end in every thing that wears a painful aspect in his dispensations towards you, I may venture to assure you that the time is coming when you shall add your testimony to that of old, "He hath done all things well." Your way may be circuitous and painful: but you will find, at the last, that "he has led you in the right way."

2. The blessedness of true Believers ?

[Where is the man under heaven, except the Believer, who can adopt the language of the text, or carry it into effect? Ungodly men may sing when all goes well with them: but where is he that will sing in the midst of his afflictions, and make his afflictions themselves a ground of joy? Nowhere is that man to be found, but in the Church of Christ; for it is to his believing people only that "God *giveth songs in the night.*" On the other hand, there is not an individual in the Church of Christ who is not privileged to experience this joy, and who does not actually possess it in proportion as he has made a progress in the divine life. Hear the prophet of old: "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will joy in the God of my salvation^a." Take this for your pattern, Brethren. You may be brought into trials, which may seem to menace your very existence: but, however the storm may rage, your Saviour is embarked in the vessel with you; yea, and is also sitting at the helm. Only reflect on his conflicts, victories, and triumphs; and you will see the way that is marked out for you: and as He fought and overcame, and is set down upon his Father's throne, so shall you also overcome, and enjoy the full recompense of your trials upon your Father's throne for ever and ever. And say, whether there will be one incident for which you will not bless your God in the eternal world? If not, then view every thing now as proceeding from his love, and as leading to the full enjoyment of heaven: and sing now both of mercy and judgment, as you will sing, when they shall have come to their final termination, and all present scenes shall be consummated in eternal bliss. I conclude, then, with that direction of the Apostle which is so suited to the occasion, "In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you^b."]

^y Gen. xlii. 36. ^z Jam. v. 11. ^a Hab. iii. 17, 18. ^b 1 Thess. v. 18.

DCLXVIII.

A WISE DEPARTMENT DELINEATED.

Ps. ci. 2. *I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. O when wilt thou come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.*

EXTENSIVE influence is a most invaluable talent, which entails upon us an awful responsibility, and should therefore be improved with all possible care and diligence. The higher we are in the scale of society, the more our obligations to exert ourselves for God are increased. But, if wisdom direct not our measures, our most strenuous efforts will be in vain. David was well convinced of this truth: and, having seen in his own experience a wise admixture of mercy and of judgment in the dealings of God towards him, he determined, in his limited sphere of action, to imitate the conduct of the Governor of the Universe, and so to temper mercy with justice in the whole of his administration, that iniquity might be suppressed, and virtue cultivated, not in his own palace only, but throughout all his dominions. We might not unprofitably enter into an investigation of the principles which he laid down for the regulation of his conduct, and mark the specific course of action which he determined to pursue towards his courtiers; but we shall waive the consideration of those particulars, and notice rather the general principle which he adopted, and which is equally applicable to persons in every station of life; "I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way; I will walk within my house with a perfect heart."

A noble resolution this! We will endeavour to point out,

I. The great importance of it—

The value of religion, *generally*, is acknowledged by all; but few are aware of the vast importance of a wise, discreet, and prudent deportment: yet on that essentially depend,

1. The peace and comfort of our own souls—

[An indiscreet conduct, even where the person's intentions on the whole are good, will involve him in many difficulties, and rob him of those supports and consolations which under other circumstances he might enjoy. True it is, that the wisest demeanour will not avail to root out prejudice, or to make religion lovely in the eyes of carnal men: for the children of darkness cannot but hate the light: and our blessed Lord himself, in whose conduct not the slightest fault or error could be found, was an object of universal hatred to the whole Jewish nation. But it is no less true, that imprudence in religious characters calls forth against them, and, in appearance, justifies, the malignity of many, who, if their zeal had been better regulated, would never have raised their arm against it. Many parents, masters, magistrates, who would never have interposed their authority to obstruct a prudent exercise of religion, have been induced to exert their power in consequence of the indiscretion of those whom they were constrained to oppose. In such cases their opposition can scarcely be called persecution; nor can the cross which the sufferers are called to bear, be called "the cross of *Christ*:" it is *their own* cross, that they have to bear, and *their own* folly, that they have to blame. Enthusiasts do indeed persuade themselves that they are suffering for righteousness sake: but having no satisfactory evidence that such is indeed the true ground of their trials, they cannot feel that humble acquiescence in the divine appointments, which, if they had acted a wiser part, would have calmed their spirits, and sweetened their afflictions^a.]

2. The benefit of all around us—

[Nothing can be more unreasonable than that men should condemn religion for the faults of those who profess it: but they will do so, and will take occasion from the misconduct of religious people to defame and deery all vital godliness^b.

It is of no consequence in their eyes, that the wise and prudent condemn the things that are complained of: no; their adversaries are not disposed to discriminate between the guilty and the innocent: they involve all in the same obloquy: and will bring the faults of former ages as grounds of accusation against those who live in the present day^c. Even the errors that were acknowledged and lamented by the persons who in early life committed them, are still adduced as characterizing not only the persons who openly renounced them, but those also who have never in any degree approximated towards them^d: and all this is done for the purpose of discrediting

^a 1 Pet. ii. 19, 20. and iv. 15, 16. ^b 2 Pet. ii. 2.

^c The errors of the Puritans are imputed to those who profess religion in the present day.

^d This is particularly to be noticed in reference to the early journals

religion, and of justifying their own aversion to it. On the other hand, great good is done by those who “walk circumspectly,” and “shine forth as lights in the world^e.” They “put to silence the ignorance of foolish men^f,” and “shame those who falsely accuse their good conversation in Christ^g.” What St. Peter says of “wives winning by their good conversation their unbelieving husbands^h,” we doubt not is often verified in all other relations of life; those who behold the light that is set before them being constrained to acknowledge, that “the righteous is more excellent than his neighbourⁱ.” A certain awe is impressed on the minds of the ungodly by the sight of “a man of God.” “Herod feared John,” when he saw what a just and holy man he was^k; and it is particularly said of Saul, that, “*when he saw that David behaved himself very wisely, he feared him^l*.” And if we will walk “holily, justly, and unblameably before men,” we shall have a testimony in their consciences, “that God is with us of a truth^m,” and that the principles we profess are “worthy of all acceptationⁿ.”]

3. The honour of God and his Gospel—

[The argument which St. Paul uses to enforce on servants the maintenance of a dutiful behaviour towards their unbelieving masters, is, “that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed^o.” How terrible is the thought that our indiscretions should ever produce such an effect as this! On the other hand, our blessed Lord bids us to “make our light shine before men, that they who behold our good works may be stirred up to glorify our heavenly Father^p.” What a stimulus is here! what a motive to circumspection! what an incentive to every thing that is great and holy! Believer, can you reflect one moment on the thought, that God can be glorified in you, and not determine, like David, to “walk wisely before him in a perfect way?” If nothing but your own welfare and the welfare of your fellow-creatures were at stake, you would watch over your every action, your every disposition; but when you consider, that the honour of God himself is in a measure dependent upon you, methinks, you should be utterly purposed, that, if it be possible, “God himself shall not find any thing amiss with you^q”; and that, at all events, your conduct

of Messrs. Whitfield and Wesley; which, though afterwards condemned by the authors themselves, are to this hour made the sole grounds of estimating their character; and not their character only, but the characters of thousands who were never guilty of any of their extravagances.

^e Phil. ii. 15, 16.

^f 1 Pet. ii. 15.

^g 1 Pet. iii. 16.

^h 1 Pet. iii. 1.

ⁱ Prov. xii. 26.

^k Mark vi. 20.

^l 1 Sam. xviii. 15.

^m 1 Cor. xiv. 25.

ⁿ 1 Tim. i. 15.

^o 1 Tim. vi. 1.

^p Matt. v. 16.

^q Ps. xvii. 3.

shall be so blameless, "that they who are of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you^r."

Having shewn the importance of this resolution, we will distinctly mark,

II. The way in which it must be carried into effect—

It is scarcely needful to say, that we must have respect to every commandment of God, without partiality or reserve; for where there is partiality there is hypocrisy^s; and where there is hypocrisy, there is neither "a perfect heart," nor "a perfect way," nor indeed one spark of true "wisdom." This then must be ever borne in mind, that without an unreserved endeavour to fulfil the whole will of God, the forming of such a resolution must be altogether nugatory and delusive. But supposing the resolution to be sincerely formed, then the question will arise, How must a person demean himself so as really to effect his wish? We answer, he must conduct himself,

1. With meekness and modesty—

[Nothing is more disgusting than forwardness in a religious character. It is offensive in any; but most of all in one who professes to feel himself a poor, blind, ignorant, guilty creature, "less than the least of all saints," yea, rather, "the very chief of sinners." How unseemly is it to see such an one full of conceit, obtrusive, talkative, loving pre-eminence, and "thinking himself to be something, when he is nothing^t!" Yet how many such professors are there, wherever the Gospel is preached! On the other hand, how lovely is the character of one that is gentle, modest, unassuming, arrogating nothing to himself, and willing on all occasions to "take the lowest place!" Such a person, whilst he himself "is beautified with salvation^u," reflects an honour on the Gospel, and "adorns the doctrine of God our Saviour^x." Such a disposition is lovely even in the sight of God himself, and is esteemed by him as "an ornament of great price^y." It should seem that this was a distinguishing feature in our Lord's character, since the Apostle particularly beseeches us "by the meekness and gentleness of Christ^z:" and the more we have of the mind of Christ in this respect, the more "wisely shall we walk both towards them that are without^a" the pale of the Church, and those that are within. The want of this disposition renders our way far more difficult,

^r Tit. ii. 8.

^s Jam. iii. 17.

^t Gal. vi. 3.

^u Ps. cxlix. 4.

^x Tit. ii. 10.

^y 1 Pet. iii. 4.

^z 2 Cor. x. 1.

^a Col. iv. 5.

whilst it incapacitates us for encountering the difficulties which it puts in our way. This then we conceive to be our first object, to obtain a humble and subdued spirit, which, whilst it offends none who differ from us, qualifies us to bear with patience, and to turn to good account, whatever evils the unreasonableness of wicked men may inflict upon us. By means of it we shall “out of the eater bring forth meat, and out of the strong bring forth sweet;” or, in other words, we shall make “all things work together for our good.”]

2. With kindness and charity—

[There is really in many religious professors almost the same acrimony against the ungodly world, as there is in the ungodly world against them. But how unbecoming is this! for, if there be a difference between us and others, who is it that has made us to differ^b? And, if we see others yet lying in their natural enmity against God, what does their state call for, but pity and compassion? Besides, love is the very end, yea the sum and substance, of all religion^c. If we have not love, we may give all our goods to feed the poor, and our body to be burned, and yet be no better than “sounding brass, and tinkling cymbals^d.” If this principle preside not in our hearts, we shall do nothing well^e. This will lead us to consult the best interests of all around us: to study how we may most influence them for their good; and to bend to circumstances, in order to abate their prejudice, and gain the easier access to their minds. It was from this principle that St. Paul “became all things to all men^f.” If he might but “gain the more,” he was ready to deny himself the most innocent enjoyments, and to comply with any requisitions, which would consist with fidelity to his God. How conciliatory will be the conduct of one who acts under this principle! With what “meekness will he give to an inquirer a reason of the hope that is in him^g; and convey instruction to a blind and obstinate opposer^h! How cautiously will he “cut off occasion from those who seek occasion against himⁱ!” How watchfully will he “abstain even from the appearance of evil^k,” and prevent, if possible, his good from being evil spoken of^l. In a word, where love is in the heart, and “the law of kindness is in the lips,” the enemies of religion will be “put to silence, and the mouths of gainsayers be stopped.”]

3. With prudence and foresight—

[Solomon observes, “I Wisdom dwell with Prudence^m.” But many seem to think that they have nothing to do with

^b 1 Cor. iv. 7.

^c 1 Tim. i. 5.

^d 1 Cor. xiii. 1.

^e 1 Cor. xvi. 14.

^f 1 Cor. ix. 19—22.

^g 1 Pet. iii. 15.

^h 2 Tim. ii. 25.

ⁱ 2 Cor. xi. 12.

^k 1 Thess. v. 22.

^l Rom. xiv. 16.

^m Prov. viii. 12.

prudence: they have only to follow their own notions of duty, and to leave all consequences to God. Hence they go forward in their own way, and in their own spirit; never once considering, what may be the effect of their conduct on the minds of others: and, though they may do some good, they do more injury than they can well conceive. But if we would behave ourselves wisely in a perfect way, we must consider the probable consequences of our actionsⁿ, and endeavour to accomplish our ends by the most inoffensive means. When Paul went to Jerusalem, where God's design of calling the Gentiles into his Church, and of abrogating the Mosaic ritual, was but imperfectly understood, he took the precaution of conferring privately with the leading members of that Church in the first instance^o, in order to explain his views to them, and through them to remove the prejudices of the people at large. This was wise; and the wisdom of it appeared in the effects which followed. Similar precautions should be used by us in all our commerce with the world at large, or with the Church in particular: we should "give no unnecessary offence either to the Jew, or to the Greek, or to the Church of God." We should consider what every one can bear; and should suit ourselves to his capacity or condition. Our blessed Lord himself set us this example, speaking every thing in a way of parables, according as his auditors were able to receive it^p. St. Paul also administered "milk or strong meat" to his converts, according as the measure of their proficiency required^q. And we also are taught to act under the influence of the same principle, towards all whom we may have occasion to address; "not casting our pearls before swine," "nor pouring new wine into old bottles," but accommodating our instructions to the necessities and dispositions of all who hear us. In a word, "I would," as St. Paul says, "have you wise concerning that which is good, and simple concerning evil^r."

4. With disinterestedness and simplicity—

[There is a carnal wisdom, which operates in a way of craft and cunning: but this is directly opposed to "the wisdom that is from above," which consists in simplicity and godly sincerity. "It is *this*, and this alone, that proceeds from the grace of God, and under the influence of which we are to have our conversation in the world^s." If there be any selfish objects proposed, any sinister motives indulged, any artifices practised by us, we are far from true wisdom: true wisdom disclaims every thing that is disingenuous. Its eye is single, its object pure, its operation lucid, uniform, irreprehensible. It will bear the light: it will shine the brightest, where it is brought most to view. If

ⁿ Eccl. viii. 5.

^o Gal. ii. 2.

^p Mark iv. 33.

^q 1 Cor. iii. 2.

^r Rom. xvi. 19.

^s 2 Cor. i. 12.

it make us “wise as serpents, it will keep us harmless as doves^t.” Every measure of deceit must be banished; all falsehood, either in word or deed, abhorred; and truth and equity must stand confessed in the whole of our dealings. This is true wisdom; and, “whosoever walks according to this rule, peace shall be upon him, and mercy, even upon all the Israel of God^u.”]

We conclude with one or two DIRECTIONS for the attainment and increase of this wisdom :

1. Let a conformity to its dictates be your constant aim—

[“The wisdom of the prudent is, to understand his way^x.” If we walk at random, and without a due consideration of our ways, we never shall attain any true wisdom. We must be aware that folly is bound up in our hearts, and that we are constantly liable to err. We must take our rule of action from the unerring words of truth. We must measure our sentiments and actions by that rule. We must in particular set the Lord Jesus Christ before us, and endeavour to drink into his spirit, and to walk in his steps. This must be our constant habit. Whether our actions be more or less important, they must all be referred to this standard, and be regulated by this principle. Then we shall gradually have our minds enlightened: we shall see with increasing evidence our former deviations from the right path. We shall see, how erroneously we judged on many occasions; and how unwisely we acted, whilst yet we thought that we were acting right. Thus our judgment will be matured; our consciences be preserved tender; and our ways be conformed to the perfect will of God. “Who then is wise and endued with knowledge amongst you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom^y.”]

2. Pray earnestly to God to inspire you with it—

[It is “the Lord alone that giveth wisdom^z :” and to him David directed his supplications, in the words of our text, “O when wilt thou come unto me?” David felt his insufficiency for that great work which lay before him, and he panted after an increase of grace to fit him for it. Thus should we pant after the influences of the Holy Spirit, to “open the eyes of our understanding,” and to “guide us into all truth.” Without the aid of the Holy Spirit we cannot hope to fill up our several stations in life with true wisdom. David, as a monarch, felt his need of divine aid to execute the resolution he had formed. Solomon desired this aid beyond either riches or honour: and God, in answer to his prayer, “gave him a wise and under-

^t Matt. x. 16.

^u Gal. vi. 16.

^x Prov. xiv. 8.

^y Jam. iii. 13.

^z Prov. ii. 6.

standing heart," above all the children of men. As ministers of God's word, we need the same: for St. Paul says, in reference to the ministry, "who is sufficient for these things?" The same must be said by us in every station and relation of life. We all have our own peculiar duties to perform; and wisdom consists in executing *them* aright. Let this never be forgotten, that our chief wisdom consists in ascertaining with precision, and performing with punctuality, *the duties of our own particular situation*. It is not by going out of our own proper line, but by filling our own particular station well, that we shall approve ourselves truly wise. Let parents and children, masters and servants, magistrates and subjects, bear this in mind: "let none lean to their own understanding^a," but all with one heart address to God this necessary petition, "O give me understanding in the way of godliness^b!"

^a Prov. iii. 5. ^b See the text in the Prayer-book Translation.

DCLXIX.

INTEGRITY.

Ps. ci. 3. *I hate the work of them that turn aside: it shall not cleave to me.*

TO improve our influence for God, is our bounden duty, whatever be the station to which he has been pleased to call us. Magistrates, in particular, may render most extensive service to the community, by exerting their power in the promotion of virtue. David felt his responsibility in this respect: and, either on his beginning to reign in Hebron after the death of Saul, or on his coming to the full possession of the kingdom at a subsequent period, he wrote this psalm, declarative of his determination to discountenance evil, and encourage good, to the utmost extent of his power, both amongst his courtiers, and amongst his more immediate attendants in his household.

Let us consider,

I. The work which he here so determinately reprobates—

The two points to which he seems to refer are,

I. A want of integrity in morals—

[A dereliction of principle has often been indulged under the idea of expediency; and the utmost subtlety of argument has been employed in vindication of it. But integrity, undeviating

integrity, should possess the Christian's mind. There are many things which will consist with what is called a sense of honour, which can never be admitted into the conduct of a real saint. The laws of honour have their origin from man: and as they derive their authority from man, so they have respect only to the judgment of man in the observance of them. These therefore may bend to times and circumstances. But the Law of God is inflexible; and our adherence to it must be uniform under all circumstances. It must regulate the ends which we propose, the means we use in the prosecution of them, and the manner in which we proceed throughout the whole of our department. In every thing we must endeavour to approve ourselves to God, and to act as in his immediate presence. Any departure from the strict line of duty, in whatever circumstances we be placed, must be avoided: and our whole conduct towards mankind, in whatever relation to us they stand, must be such as we, in a change of circumstances, should think it right for them to observe towards us. God requires that "truth should be in our inward parts^a;" and every act, every word, every purpose and desire of our hearts, ought to be in strict accordance with it.]

2. A want of constancy in religion—

[Many there are, who, having begun well, leave off to behave themselves wisely, and "turn aside from the holy commandment delivered to them^b." Various are the sources of this declension. Sometimes it begins in a neglect of religious duties, or in the mere formal performance of them. Sometimes it originates in the secret indulgence of some hidden lust. Sometimes "the care of this world, the deceitfulness of riches," and the desire of other things which have no direct reference to religion, choke the seed that has been sown in our hearts, and prevent it from bringing forth any fruit unto perfection^c. But whatever it be that turns us from God, it should be discountenanced in others, and avoided in ourselves. It may have a specious aspect: much may be said for it to extenuate, if not altogether to justify, the practice of it: but if its operation be to turn us aside from God, and from the pursuit of heavenly things, it becomes an evil work, which it behoves us to renounce.

We must, however, be careful not to impute to any line of duty the evils which arise from our own want of care in the prosecution of it. There is not any thing which we may not make an *occasion* of sin. A person may say, 'I have intellectual pursuits, which occupy my mind with such intensity, that I cannot fix it afterwards upon heavenly things:' or, 'I have a manual labour, which indisposes me for heavenly contemplation.' In such cases, the duty of these persons is, not to renounce

^a Ps. li. 6.

^b 2 Pet. ii. 21.

^c Matt. xiii. 22.

the labours to which, in the course of providence, they have been called, but to implore of God such a measure of spiritual strength as may enable them to combine the duties which they have been wont to separate: nor can we doubt, but that, if they be upright in heart, they shall have imparted to them grace sufficient for the conscientious discharge of all their duties. The point for them especially to attend to, is, that they guard against every inordinate desire: for it is from their inward desires, rather than their outward duties, that they are in any danger of being drawn from God.]

The conduct of the Psalmist, in relation to such “work,” shews,

II. The disposition which we also should manifest towards it—

1. We should abhor it in principle—

[There should be in us an attraction towards God, resembling that of the needle to the pole. A needle may, by force, be turned from its proper direction: but it will never cease from a tremulous motion, till it has returned again to its proper rest. So it may be with us. We know not what deviations a sudden impulse of temptation may cause for a moment: but the very instant we perceive that we have departed, even in thought, from the perfect line of duty, we should give neither sleep to our eyes nor slumber to our eye-lids, till we have returned with penitential sorrow to our God. The direction given to us by God is, “Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good^d.” And, whether in relation to morals or religion, this must be the constant habit of our minds. We must be “Israelites indeed, in whom there is no guile^e.”

2. We should avoid it in practice—

[We never can be too observant of our own ways. As, at sea, the mariner is often drawn from his course by currents of which he was not aware, and only finds his deviation from his appointed course by the observations which he makes; so it is possible for a Christian to be drawn aside by a corrupt bias, till he has carefully compared his ways with the unerring standard of the word of God. Hence the need of attending to that divine counsel, “Prove all things; and hold fast that which is good^f.” It is not without extreme care that we shall be able to “keep a conscience void of offence towards both God and man.” We are passing through a polluted world; and it is very difficult to “keep our garments altogether undefiled^g.” But if we come in contact with evil, we must take care that it does “not cleave

^d Rom. xii. 9.

^e John i. 47.

^f 1 Thess. v. 21.

^g Rev. iii. 4.

unto us." It must be the one labour of our lives to be "sincere, and without offence, until the day of Christ^h."]]

ADDRESS—

1. Mark well the beginnings of declension—

[“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith,” says the Apostle: “prove your own selvesⁱ.” Let the first symptoms of spiritual declension be carefully noted by you, and be made an occasion of augmented diligence in your heavenly course. Many evils will you avoid by such watchfulness. Happy would it have been for David, if he had marked the first risings of desire, which the sight of Bathsheba excited in his soul. And happy will it be for us, if we determine, through grace, to abstain, not from evil only, but from the first motions of it, yea, and even “the very appearance of it,” whether in heart or life^k.]

2. Avoid the means and occasions of it—

[Our Lord teaches us to pray, that we may “not be led into temptation.” In truth, if we willingly subject ourselves to temptation, we cannot expect to be kept. We must “take heed to our ways,” and shun the scenes of vice and folly; and avoid the company, and conversation, and books, and sights, that would ensnare us, if we would be preserved “holy and unblameable and unreprouable in the world.” If we “come out from among the ungodly, and touch not the unclean thing, then will God be a Father unto us, and we shall be his sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty^l.”]

^h Phil. i. 10.

ⁱ 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

^k 1 Thess. v. 22.

^l 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18.

DCLXX.

THE RESTORATION OF THE JEWS.

Ps. cii. 13—15. *Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come: for thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof. So the heathen shall fear the name of the Lord, and all the kings of the earth thy glory.*

AMIDST all the personal afflictions with which a Child of God can be encompassed, he will be filled with consolation, if he hear glad tidings concerning Zion. The interests of God and the welfare of mankind are nearer to his heart than any of the concerns of time and sense. Hence Paul, when complaining that he “suffered trouble, as an evil-doer, even unto bonds,” consoled himself with this, that “the word of

God was not bound^a:" yea, his very bonds themselves were an occasion of joy to his soul, when he saw that they were overruled for the establishment of Believers, and the augmentation of the Church of God^b. Thus, in the psalm before us, the writer, whether speaking in his own person, or personating the Church of God, was in a most disconsolate condition^c; — — — but the thought of God's speedy interposition for his Church and people comforted him. He saw Jerusalem lying in ruins; but he felt assured that the time was near at hand, when it should be rebuilt, and God's glory be manifested in it as in the days of old. To the Gospel Church also he had a further reference in his own mind: for though the restoration of the Jews from Babylon attracted some attention from the neighbouring states, it was far from being attended with those effects which are here foretold as following from their yet future restoration to their own land, and their final union with the Church of Christ^d.

In considering this event, we shall notice,

I. The time fixed for it—

God most assuredly has mercy in store for Zion—

[The Jews shall not always continue in their present degraded state: they shall be gathered from every quarter of the globe, and be brought back again to their own land. We must almost cease to assign any determinate meaning to words, if we explain in a figurative sense only the numberless declarations of God on this subject^e — — — As to their restoration to the Divine favour, it is impossible for any one who believes the Scriptures to doubt of it. Though God is angry with them, he has not cast them off for ever. There is yet among them "a remnant according to the election of grace," who shall be again engrafted on their own olive-tree, and enjoy all the riches of the Gospel salvation^f — — —]

For the conferring of "these favours," there is a time fixed in the Divine counsels—

^a 2 Tim. ii. 9. ^b Phil. i. 12—18. ^c ver. 3—11.

^d That the writer looks forward to that period, will appear by comparing ver. 25—27. with Heb. i. 10—12.

^e Ezek. xxviii. 25, 26. and xxxvii. 1—28.

^f Rom. xi. 5, 25, 26.

["Known unto God are all things from the foundation of the world:" and every thing that is "done, is done according to his determinate counsel and fore-knowledge^g." The deliverance of the Jews from Egypt was foretold to Abraham four hundred and thirty years before it took place; and it was accomplished *on the self-same day* that had been then fixed^h. In like manner, their deliverance from Babylon was fixed; nor were they detained one hour there beyond the seventy years that had been assigned for their captivityⁱ. Thus is the period fixed for their present dispersion. It is to terminate one thousand two hundred and sixty years after the establishment of the Papal tyranny and of the Mahometan delusion. Other thirty years are added to that time for completing of that glorious work, and forty-five more for the full introduction of the Millennium, when all the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ^k. Respecting the exact time from whence these several periods must be dated, Commentators are not agreed; nor is it our intention to enter into that part of the question: we only mention these things to shew, that "God has reserved the times and the seasons in his own power," and that the time for the future restoration of the Jews is as determinately fixed in the Divine counsels, as any other event that ever occurred.]

We think too that we may already see,

II. The signs of its approach—

When our blessed Lord came to establish his kingdom upon earth, there were many signs whereby a candid observer might ascertain that he was really come^l. An expectation of him had prevailed both among Jews and Gentiles^m; his forerunner, John the Baptist, had come to prepare his wayⁿ: and his own miracles had evinced, that he was indeed the person whom he professed to be^o. Thus the Psalmist intimates that there are signs, whereby the future manifestations of his love and mercy to his people Israel shall be discerned, previous to their full accomplishment: "The time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come; *for* thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof." We say

^g Acts ii. 23. and iv. 28.

^h Exod. xii. 41.

ⁱ Jer. xxv. 12. and xxix. 10.

^k Dan. vii. 25. and xii. 7, 11, 12. with Rev. xi. 3, 15. and xii. 6, 14. and xiii. 5.

^l Matt. xvi. 3.

^m Luke ii. 25, 38. ⁿ Matt. xvii. 9—13.

^o John v. 36.

then that the approach of that blessed period is now evidently marked by,

1. The concern that is now felt for the Jewish people—

[How many centuries have passed without any efforts made for their conversion to the faith of Christ! They have been regarded by the Christian world as utterly unworthy of notice: or rather, have been treated by them with all manner of indignity, oppression, and cruelty. But now Christians begin to feel how basely they have acted towards them; and are combining their efforts to rend the veil from their hearts: and by all possible means to lead them to the knowledge of that Messiah, whom their fathers crucified^p — — —]

2. The expectation which the Jews have of their approaching deliverance—

[The Jews even of our own country, and still more upon the Continent, have a persuasion that their Messiah is speedily to appear, and to vindicate them from the oppression which they have so long experienced^q. And though they do not at present know what kinds of blessings they are destined to enjoy, (for they look no further than to a temporal deliverance,) yet the circumstance of their “looking for redemption” as fast approaching, may justly be regarded as a sign of its actual approach.]

3. The work that has already been effected among them—

[Many have been converted to the faith of Christ: and though, as in the first ages of Christianity, many have dishonoured, or renounced, their holy profession, yet many have held fast their faith amidst the heaviest trials, and have adorned the Gospel by a holy conversation. We cannot, it is true, boast of thousands converted at once: nor were the efforts of John, and of the Lord Jesus Christ himself, very successful for a season: even after all the labours and miracles of our Lord, his disciples amounted only to five hundred; the greatest part of those who were convinced by him for a season having gone back from him: but the seed sown by him grew up on the day of Pentecost, and brought forth fruit an hundred-fold: in like manner we have only fruit sufficient at present to encourage our continued exertions; but we hope that Pentecostal fruits

^p The attention paid to the study of prophecy in this day is remarkable.

^q Persons conversant with India have assured us, that both Mahometans and Hindoos have an expectation also that a great change is about to take place in the religions which they profess.

will yet be found, and *that* too at no distant period. At all events we have evidence enough to shew, that God is with us in our labours of love, and to assure us, that we shall not labour in vain, or run in vain. The very circumstance of so many heralds being stirred up to prepare their way, is a strong ground of hope that ere long “the valleys shall be exalted, and the mountains and hills be made low, and the crooked be made straight, and the rough places plain; and that the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together^r.”]

Nor are we left in uncertainty about,

III. The effects of its arrival—

To the Jews themselves the effects will be glorious—

[Such prosperity, both temporal and spiritual, will they enjoy, as was but faintly typified in the days of Solomon———
“The light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun seven-fold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound^s”———]

To the Gentiles also it will be the commencement of inconceivable and universal happiness—

[*This is particularly marked in our text*; “So the heathen shall fear the name of the Lord:” yes, the restoration and conversion of the Jews will be “as life from the dead” to the whole Gentile world^t. Their deliverances from Egypt and from Babylon attracted the attention of the nations which were round about them; but this deliverance will fill with surprise and astonishment all the nations upon earth: for the Jews are scattered through every country under heaven: and in every country there will be a simultaneous motion of the Jews towards their own land, and a turning to that Saviour, whom now they hate. This will carry conviction to the minds of all, that Jesus is the true Messiah, the only, and all-sufficient Saviour of the whole world. Then will all the great ones of the earth, the highest kings, no less than their meanest subjects, behold the glory of God in the face of our adorable Saviour; and all, both Jews and Gentiles, become one fold under one Shepherd^u———
However incredible this may appear, it shall assuredly be effected in due season; for the Lord hath promised; and not a jot or tittle of his word shall fail.]

ADDRESS—

1. Have compassion upon Zion—

^r Isai. xl. 3—5. ^s Isai. xxx. 26. ^t Rom. xi. 12, 15.

^u See Isai. lx. 1—8, 10—14. Ps. lxxii. 8—11, 16—19. Zech. ii. 10—12. and viii. 20—23. and xiv. 9.

[See how deplorable is the present state of God's ancient people: compare it with the former periods of their history when they were so signally honoured with the presence of their God in the wilderness, and at Sinai, and in the days of David and Solomon — — — Shall not the contrast fill you with pity and compassion? Methinks you can scarcely have the feelings of *men*, much less of *Christians*, if you do not weep over their forlorn and destitute condition. See how Nehemiah felt the desolations of *Zion* in his day ^x! — — — and is there not yet greater occasion for you to do so now? See how Daniel set himself to implore mercy for his brethren, encouraged by the near approach of the time destined for their deliverance ^y — — — And let the prospect we have of an infinitely greater deliverance for them, stimulate you to similar exertions in their behalf. Let nothing be wanting on your part that can contribute to their good. Your time, your money, your influence will be well employed in so glorious a cause: and be assured that in endeavouring to "water others, you shall be watered yourselves."]

2. Seek to experience the good work in your own souls—

[We would not so draw your attention to the vineyard of others, as to divert it from your own. If it be desirable for the Jews to "fear the name of the Lord, and to behold his glory," it is surely no less desirable for you also. Brethren, this charity must begin at home. It will be a fearful thing to "preach to others, and to become cast away ourselves." Begin then, every one of you, to seek the favour of God to your own souls. Truly it is lamentable to see in what a state our Christian *Zion* is: and how many amongst us differ little from the Jews, except in name and profession. And in this we are far more guilty than they, because, whilst they are misled through the blindness that is come upon them, we sin against light and knowledge, and, Judas-like, betray the Saviour whom we profess to love. Let us hope, however, that the time for God to favour us is come; (O that it may be come, and that our eyes may see it!) and that the tabernacle of David which is fallen down, shall be speedily reared amongst us, to the glory of God, and to the salvation of many souls. Much as we desire your aid for the Jewish nation, our first desire is, that you yourselves may be saved. In this we are sanctioned by the apostle Paul, who, whilst he pitied the Gentile world, desired to be accused from Christ if it might but be instrumental to the saving of his brethren the Jews. To you then, Brethren, we say, *First* give your own selves to the Lord, and *afterwards* to us, by the will of God ^z — — —]

^x Neh. ii. 2, 3.

^y Dan. ix. 2, 3.

^z 2 Cor. viii. 5.

DCLXXI.

THE ETERNITY AND IMMUTABILITY OF CHRIST.

Ps. cii. 25—28. *Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the work of thy hands: they shall perish, but thou shalt endure; yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment: as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end. The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee.*

AMONGST all the Psalms, there is none more full of mourning and lamentation than this: but whether the Psalmist speaks in his own person, or in the person of the Church which was in the most desolate condition, is not certain. But though written at the return of the Jews from the Babylonish Captivity, and referring primarily to the restoration of the Jewish Church and polity, it evidently has respect to the Messiah and the establishment of his Church on the face of the whole earth: since it is said, that “the heathen shall fear the name of the Lord, and all the kings of the earth his glory^a.” Indeed the words of our text are expressly applied to Christ in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and are adduced to shew the infinite superiority of Christ above all the hosts of heaven^b. With this infallible guide to direct us, we proceed to point out,

I. The perfections of Christ—

The description here given of our Lord Jesus Christ proves beyond all doubt his proper Deity. Observe,

1. His eternity—

[He it was who made the universe: the highest angels derived their existence from his all-creating hand^c. “All things were created, not only *by* him, but *for* him^d:” which could not be, if he himself were a creature. Suppose him ever so high above all other creatures, if he himself was a creature, he could not have created *all things*, seeing he himself must have been created by another. But he was the eternal God: “he was with God, and was God: and *without him was not any thing made that was made*^e.” Yes, that adorable Saviour, who at the

^a ver. 15.

^b Heb. i. 10—12.

^c Col. i. 16.

^d Col. i. 17.

^e John i. 1—3.

appointed season assumed our flesh at Bethlehem, was the eternal God; “his goings forth were of old, from everlasting^f.”]

2. His immutability—

[The material creation is formed only as a theatre for the display of the Creator’s glory: and, when it shall have answered its destined end, it will be destroyed by fire^g: the Creator will dissolve it with as much ease as a man “folds up a garment” for which he has no farther use. But the Lord Jesus Christ will exist for ever. As he is the eternal, so is he the immutable Jehovah: “He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever^h.”]

Not to dwell on a point which requires neither confirmation nor discussion: we proceed to mark more distinctly,

II. The aspect of those perfections on the welfare of the Church—

In the verse before the text, the Psalmist may be speaking personally of himself, just as Hezekiah did when apprehensive of speedy dissolutionⁱ: but in the close of the psalm he indisputably speaks of the Church, and, represents as depending upon Christ,

1. The stability of the Church at large—

[The seed here mentioned are the Church of God, the company of the faithful in every age^k. It might be supposed that these, surrounded as they are by enemies on every side, must be utterly destroyed: and, in fact, the Church has at times been reduced so low, as scarcely to have, except in name, any existence upon earth. But our Lord has founded it upon a rock; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Other things, however stable in appearance, shall vanish away: but this shall stand for ever and ever^l. The different individuals are successively removed by death: but children shall be born to God through the instrumentality of his Gospel, and the Church “continue” to the end of time.]

2. The final salvation of every true Believer—

[It is a miracle, considering what difficulties the Believer has to encounter, and how unable he is of himself to do even the least thing that is good, that any one should finally attain the promised inheritance. But Jesus lives, and therefore all who trust in him shall live also. In his word he is as immutable as

^f Mic. v. 2. The same truth is generally supposed to be declared in Prov. viii. 22—31.

^g 2 Pet. iii. 10, 12. ^h Heb. xiii. 8. ⁱ Isai. xxxviii. 10—14.

^k Ps. lxix. 36. ^l Isai. li. 6.

in his essence: and “of that word not one jot or tittle shall ever fail.” “Never will he leave them; never, never will he forsake them.” “He is able to keep them from falling;” and, “Of those whom the Father has given him will he lose none.”]

IMPROVEMENT—

Is there amongst you any tempted soul?

[Methinks some may be in the state of the Psalmist, “eating ashes like bread, and mingling their drink with tears” — — — But let not any one be so bowed down with afflictions, as to say, “There is no hope.” Whilst your Redeemer lives, you have a sure refuge: and, whatever trials you may have to sustain, “his grace shall be sufficient for you” — — —]

To those who are maintaining their steadfastness in the Gospel—

[We would say, Remember to whom you are indebted for your stability: “He that hath wrought you to this self-same thing is God.” O think, what had been your state times without number, if your Almighty Saviour had not interposed to rescue you from the jaws of that roaring lion that seeketh to devour you — — — and let all your confidence be in him alone — — —]

DCLXXII.

DUTY OF PRAISING GOD FOR HIS MERCIES.

Ps. ciii. 1—5. *Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases: who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies: who satisfieth thy mouth with good things, so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.*

IT is a favourite opinion of some divines, that we are bound to love God for his own perfections, without having any respect to the benefits which we receive from him. But this appears to us to be an unscriptural refinement. That God *deserves* all possible love from his creatures on account of his own perfections, can admit of no doubt: and we can easily conceive, that persons may be so occupied with an admiration of his perfections, as not to have in their minds any distinct reference to the benefits they have received from him: but that any creature can place himself in the situation of a being who has no obli-

gations to God for past mercies, and no expectation of future blessings from him, we very much doubt: nor are we aware that God any where requires us so to divest ourselves of all the feelings of humanity, for the sake of engaging more entirely in the contemplation of his perfections. Nor indeed can we consent to the idea, that gratitude is so low a virtue^a. On the contrary, it seems to be the principle that animates all the hosts of the redeemed in heaven; who are incessantly occupied in singing praises to Him who loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood. By this also all the most eminent saints on earth have been distinguished. In proof of this, we need go no further than to the psalm before us, wherein the man after God's own heart adores and magnifies his Benefactor, for some particular mercies recently vouchsafed unto him. To instil this principle into your minds, and to lead you to a measure of that devotion with which the sweet singer of Israel was inspired, we shall,

I. State the grounds we have to praise God—

To enumerate all the benefits we have received from God, would be impossible. We must content ourselves with adverting to them in the peculiar view in which they are set before us in the text. We would call you then to consider,

1. The freeness and undeservedness of them—

[It is this which gives a zest to every blessing we enjoy: in this view, the very food we eat, and the air we breathe, demand our most grateful acknowledgments. The Psalmist begins with speaking of himself as a guilty and corrupt creature, who, unless pardoned and renewed by the grace of God, must have been an everlasting monument of his righteous displeasure. The same thought also should be uppermost in our minds. We should contrast our state with that of the fallen angels, who never had a Saviour vouchsafed unto them; and with that of the unbelieving world, who, in consequence of rejecting the Saviour, have perished in their sins. What claim had we, any more than the fallen angels? and, if we had been dealt with according to our deserts, where would have been the difference between us and those who are gone beyond the reach of mercy?

^a Deut. xxviii. 47.

Let us but contemplate this, and the smallest mercy we enjoy will appear exceeding great; yea, any thing short of hell will be esteemed a mercy^b.]

2. The richness and variety—

[The psalm primarily relates to David's recovery from some heavy disorder: and the terms wherein he expresses his gratitude are precisely such as are used by other persons on similar occasions^c. On this account, in our review of God's mercies, it will be proper first to notice the blessings of his *providence*. How often have we been visited with some bodily disorder, which, for aught we know, has been sent as a preventive or punishment of sin! (We certainly have reason to think, that at this time, as well as in former ages, God punishes the sins of his people in this world, that they may not be condemned in the world to come^d.) And how often have we been raised from a state of weakness and danger, to renewed life and vigour! At all events, we have been beset with dangers, and yet not permitted to fall a sacrifice to them; and been encompassed with wants, which have been liberally supplied. Can we view all these mercies with indifference? do they not demand from us a tribute of praise?

But the expressions in the text lead us to contemplate also the blessings of God's *grace*. And can we adopt the words in this view? O how great and wonderful are they, if we appreciate them aright! To be forgiven one sin is a mercy of inconceivable magnitude; but to be forgiven *all*, all that we have ever committed, this is a mercy which neither the tongues of men nor of angels can ever adequately declare. Think too of the corruptions which with most inveterate malignity infect our souls: to have these healed! to have them *all* healed: We no longer wonder at the ardour of the Psalmist's devotion; we wonder only at our own stupidity. Contemplate moreover the efforts which Satan, that roaring lion, is ever making to destroy us; consider his wiles, his deceits, his fiery darts: what a stupendous mercy is it that we have not been given up as a prey unto his teeth! Look around at the mercies of all kinds with which we are *encircled*: and mark the provision of ordinances, and promises, yea, of the body and blood of God's only dear Son, with which our souls are nourished and renewed; so that our drooping spirits, like the eagle when renewed in its plumage, are enabled to soar to the highest heavens with confidence and joy. Can we find in these things no grounds of praise? Must not our hearts be harder than adamant itself, if they do not melt at the contemplation of such mercies as these?]

^b See how this consideration enhanced the favours which God vouchsafed to David, Ps. viii. 1. and St. Paul, Eph. iii. 8.

^c Isai. xxxviii. 17. ^d Compare 1 Cor. xi. 30, 32. with Jam. v. 15

3. The constancy and continuance—

[See how triumphantly the Psalmist dwells on this^e; and let us compare our experience with his. Has not God made *us* also the objects of his *providential care*, by day and by night, from the earliest period of our existence to this present moment? Has he not also renewed to us every day and hour *the blessings of his grace*, “watering us as his garden,” and “encompassing us with his favour as with a shield?” Surely we may say that “goodness and mercy have followed us all our days;” there has not been one single moment when our Divine keeper has ever slumbered or slept; he has kept us, “even as the apple of his eye;” “lest any should hurt us, he has kept us day and night.”

Say now, what are the feelings which such mercies should generate in our souls; and what are the returns which we ought to make to our heavenly Benefactor?]

Not doubting but that all of you must acknowledge your obligation to praise God, we will, as God shall enable us,

II. Stir you up to the performance of this duty—

It is the office of your minister to stir up your pure minds “by way of remembrance,” yea, “to put you in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth.” We therefore call upon you to praise God,

1. Individually—

[This is not the duty of ministers only, but of all, whatever be their age, situation, or condition in life: every one is unspeakably indebted to God; and therefore every one should say for himself, “Bless the Lord, O *my* soul!”

If any object, that they have never yet been made partakers of the blessings of Divine grace, we answer, That you have not on this account the less reason to bless God; for the very “long-suffering of God should be accounted by you as salvation;” and if you compare your state (as yet on mercy’s ground) with that of those who have been cut off in their sins, you will see that all the thanks which you can possibly render unto God, are infinitely less than what he deserves at your hands.

Moreover, if you have received no signal deliverances from sickness or danger, you have the more reason to adore your God, who has preserved you so long in the uninterrupted enjoyment of health and peace.]

2. Fervently—

^e *Forgiveth, healeth, redcemeth, crowneth, satisfieth.*

[Praise is not a service of the lip and knee, but of the warmest affections of the soul. The "*soul, and all that is within you,*" should be exercised in this blessed work. As you are to "love God with all your heart, and mind, and soul, and strength," so also you are to bless him with all your faculties and powers. You must not however mistake vociferation, and talkativeness, and bodily fervour, for devotion; your expressions of gratitude, even when most elevated and joyous, must resemble those which are used among the heavenly hosts; who "veil their faces and their feet," or "cast their crowns at the feet" of their adorable Redeemer. Not to bless him *in this manner*, is constructively and really to "*forget the benefits*" you have received from him: yea, an utter forgetfulness of them were less criminal than such an ungrateful remembrance.]

3. Incessantly—

["Bless, bless, bless the Lord!" says the Psalmist to his soul; shewing thereby that he would have that to be the continual exercise of his mind. Thus should we also labour to have our minds in a constant readiness for this glorious work. We need not indeed be always engaged in the *act* of praise; for we have many other acts in which a great part of our time must be occupied: but the *frame of our minds* should always be disposed for this duty, so as to be ready for it whensoever occasion may call for the performance of it. That we shall feel backwardness to it at times, must be expected: the Psalmist intimates as much, by so *repeatedly urging* his reluctant soul to this duty. But let us follow his example, and urge our souls, however reluctant, to this blessed work. Let us say with him, "Bless the Lord, O my soul; bless him, bless his holy name!" or like Deborah, "Awake, awake, Deborah; awake, awake; utter a song!"

Thus to bless God is our privilege on earth: thus to bless him is an antepast of heaven.]

DCLXXIII.

THE GOODNESS OF GOD.

Ps. ciii. 8—13. *The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide; neither will he keep his anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.*

WE cannot form a juster conception of the Deity than from the history of the Israelites. In the mixture of mercy and judgment which is there recorded, we see every one of his perfections displayed in most lively characters^a. His dealings with us indeed are less discernible: but, the more they are scrutinized, the more will they appear to be regulated according to the counsels of unerring wisdom and unbounded goodness. The words before us will naturally lead us to a contemplation of this subject: and we shall have abundant evidence of their truth, while we consider his goodness,

I. Generally, as it is in himself—

The “mercy and grace” of our God are chiefly discovered by,

1. His patience in bearing with us—

[Had God been such an one as ourselves, he would long since have broke forth in anger against the whole world, and consumed them in his heavy displeasure. But, notwithstanding the multitude of their provocations, he has been long-suffering towards them^b, and has waited to be gracious unto them^c. He has borne with many vessels of wrath, that have been daily fitting themselves for destruction^d: and has kept mercy for thousands^e, who have been continually occupied in casting it away. The description which Nehemiah gives of the divine patience as manifested in his day^f, is no less realized towards the whole world at this very hour.]

2. His mercy in pardoning us—

[God, in infinite compassion, laid our iniquities upon his only dear Son^g, and exacted of him our debt^h, in order that he might exercise mercy towards us consistently with the demands of truth and justiceⁱ. And, having provided such a remedy, he delights in extending its benefits even to the vilest of the human race^k. Thousands that are now glorified in heaven, and thousands too that are yet compassed with infirmities on earth, can attest, that with him is plenteous redemption^l, and that he is rich in mercy unto all that call upon him^m.]

^a ver. 7.

^b 2 Pet. iii. 9.

^c Isai. xxx. 18.

^d Rom. ix. 22.

^e Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.

^f Neh. ix. 16—21.

^g Isai. liii. 6.

^h Isai. liii. 7. Lowth's Translation.

ⁱ Rom. iii. 25, 26.

^k Mic. vii. 18.

^l Ps. cxxx. 7, 8.

^m Rom. x. 12, 13.

Not to dwell on general views of his goodness, let us consider it,

II. Particularly as it manifests itself towards us—

It is here more minutely delineated :

1. In reference to his patience—

[God will “clide” his people for their sins; nor would he act worthy of himself, if he did not manifest his displeasure against the violations of his holy lawⁿ. But we must all confess that he punishes *neither soon—nor long—nor according to our deserts*. Not *soon*; for then he would be “always chiding,” seeing that we give continual occasion for his displeasure to arise. But he is not extreme to mark what is done amiss^o, well knowing that if he should contend with us for every fault, we could not answer him one of a thousand^p. Nor will he visit us *long*: if he hide his face, it is but for a little moment^q, and if he wound us, it is, for the most part, but a very short time before he binds us up again and heals us^r. He will not be always wroth, lest our spirits should faint, and fail by reason of his displeasure^s. Nor does he at any time “deal with us *according to our iniquities*.” Where must every one of us have been if he had entered into judgment with us according to the strict tenour of his law^t? Whatever trials we may have been called to endure, they have been infinitely less than our iniquities have deserved^u.]

2. In reference to his mercy—

[This has been *boundless in its extent*. Who can measure the vast expanse of heaven^x? Yet such is the mercy of our God, having heights that cannot be explored, and depths that cannot be fathomed^y. It reaches, not only to all persons, but to the utmost extent of their necessities or desires. It is also *tender in its exercise*. Can any thing on earth afford us a stronger image of tenderness, than a parent striving to soothe the anguish of his agonizing infant? Yet such is the anxiety which God himself feels to heal our wounded spirits, and comfort us under all our conflicts^z. It is, moreover, *lasting in its effects*. Let a straight line be drawn from east to west; and the further it is drawn, the further shall the ends be removed from each other. Thus it is with respect to our sins which he has pardoned: they are put away from us to the remotest distance, never to meet upon our souls again, never to be remembered against us to all eternity^a.]

ⁿ Heb. xii. 6, 7.

^o Ps. cxxx. 3.

^p Job ix. 3.

^q Isai. liv. 7, 8.

^r Hos. vi. 1, 2.

^s Isai. lvii. 16.

^t Compare Gal. iii. 10. with Ps. cxliii. 2.

^u Job xi. 6.

^x Jer. xxxi. 37.

^y Eph. iii. 18, 19.

^z Hos. xi. 8. Jer. xxxi. 20.

^a ver. 17. Mic. vii. 19.

INFER—

1. How base is it to sin against such a God!

[Sin, of whatever kind, is really directed against him^b. And shall it appear a light matter to us to offend such a God? See this argument urged by Ezra^c; and let every temptation be repelled with this indignant expression, How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God^d?]

2. How ought we to fear and love our God!

[It is twice observed in the text, that God's mercy is displayed "to them that *fear* him:" and it is manifested on purpose that he may be feared^e. Let us therefore not despise the riches of his goodness^f, but improve them for the confirming of our fear^g, and the quickening of our love^h.]

^b Ps. li. 4.^c Ezra ix. 13, 14. Heb. viii. 12.^d Gen. xxxix. 9.^e Ps. cxxx. 4.^f Rom. ii. 4.^g Hos. iii. 5.^h Ps. cxvi. 12. and cxlv. 8, 9, 21.

DCLXXIV.

PERPETUITY OF GOD'S MERCY.

Ps. ciii. 15—18. *As for man, his days are as grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth: for the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more. But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; to such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them.*

THE consideration of the shortness and uncertainty of human life is at all times seasonable, and more especially on such an occasion as this; when &c.^a — — — If indeed we had no hope beyond the grave, such a subject would be most gloomy and appalling: but when connected, as in the passage before us, with the unbounded mercy of our God, it is full of consolation to all who are looking forward to the eternal world. But we must have a good hope that we shall be partakers of God's mercy, or else not even the glorious description which is here given of it will divest death of its sting, or reconcile us to the thought of approaching dissolution. Let us then from these words consider,

^a The occasion may be stated as for a *Funeral*, or on *New Year's Day*.

I. The character of God's people—

In general terms they are represented as “fearing God.” This of itself would be sufficient to distinguish them from all other people, more especially as it marks “the spirit of their minds.” A humble sense of his presence, a dread of doing any thing contrary to his will, and a filial desire to please him, universally distinguish his children: but still they are more clearly discerned by the characters assigned to them in our text:

1. They “keep God's covenant”—

[This is the covenant which was made with Abraham^b; and of which Christ is the surety: he has undertaken to accomplish every thing for his believing people; to expiate their sins by his blood, and to renew their souls by his grace — — — “It is ordered in all things and sure^c” — — — This the Believer sees to be exactly suited to his necessities, in that it provides every thing for him, and only requires that he receive thankfully what is thus offered to him freely. This therefore he embraces: “He lays hold on it” as all his hope: and he relies upon it with his whole heart — — —]

2. They “do his commandments”—

[They are not negligent of good works, though they do not rely upon them for their justification before God: “they love God's law,” which is written in their hearts: and they treasure up in their minds his precepts, no less than his promises. To do the will of God, to do it universally without exception, and constantly without intermission, is the one desire of their hearts. They would gladly, if it were possible, “stand perfect and complete in all the will of God,” being “holy, as God is holy,” and “perfect, even as their Father which is in heaven is perfect.”]

Such are the objects of God's love: but how shall we express,

II. The extent of his mercy towards them—

The mercy of God is the great subject of this psalm. In the foregoing verses it is set forth *in a way of comparison*; (equalling the boundless extent of heaven;) but in the words before us it is declared *in a way of contrast* with the transitoriness of man's existence upon earth.

Man's existence here is only as the flower of the field—

^b Gal. iii. 16, 17.

^c 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

[It was “but yesterday” that we grew up; and to-morrow “our place will no more be found.” If suffered to continue for a while, we are only ripening for the scythe; but a burning sun, or blasting wind, may cut short our existence in an hour^d. And when once the flower of the grass is withered, all remembrance of it is gone: and so it is with us: we look gay and flourish for a little moment: and then pass away, and give place to other generations.]

But “the mercy of God towards his people is from everlasting to everlasting”—

[As to its *origin*, it existed from all eternity. It is not excited in the bosom of our God by any thing that he sees in man: neither the misery of our fallen state, nor any goodness which we may be supposed to manifest, move him to exercise a disposition that was not antecedently conceived in his own mind. Both his determination to exercise mercy, and the objects towards whom it should be exercised, were from all eternity fixed in his own bosom^e. His people are chosen by him, not because they *are* holy, or *will be* holy, but that they “*may be* holy, and without blame before him in love^f.” “He loved them with an everlasting love, and therefore with loving-kindness hath he drawn them^g.”

In its *duration* also it is everlasting. “If he have begun a good work in them, we may be confident that he will carry it on^h.” As, on the one hand, he will not depart from them, so, on the other hand, “he will put his fear in their hearts, that they may not depart from himⁱ.” If at any time they transgress against him, he will chastise them with the rod, till he has brought them back to himself: but “his loving-kindness will he not utterly take from them^k,” for “his gifts and callings are without repentance^l.” In every age will he prove faithful to his promises, even “to all posterities for evermore.”

This doctrine is thought by many to encourage a presumptuous confidence, and a consequent neglect of holiness. But, if we only bear in mind the statement before given of the character of God’s people, and our unequivocal declaration, that no person who does not answer to that character can have any scriptural hope of mercy, we shall see, that there is no occasion for jealousy on that head. The holiness of man is secured by the irreversible decree of Heaven, That the end shall be combined with the means; and that every one whom God has ordained unto life, shall be “made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.” We need not be afraid to give unto God all

^d Jam. i. 10, 11.

^e Eph. iii. 11. 2 Tim. i. 9.

^f Eph. i. 4—6.

^g Jer. xxxi. 3.

^h Phil. i. 6.

ⁱ Jer. xxxii. 40.

^k Ps. lxxxix. 30—36.

^l Rom. xi. 29.

the glory of our salvation, and to ascribe all to the operation of his sovereign grace, since, whatever may be said of God's decrees, it is an infallible truth, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord."]

Let us LEARN from hence,

1. In what light we should view our present state of existence—

[We should learn from nature, and from every thing we see around us. Let all, and the young especially, look, not at the grass merely, but at the flower of the grass, and learn from that, how transient their life is^m — — — And let none, like the fool in the Gospel, promise themselves years, when, for ought they know, this very night their souls may be required of them.]

2. In what way we should improve it—

[What have we to do, but to attain the character of God's people, and to secure the mercy which he will exercise towards them? — — — In comparison of this, all earthly pursuits are vanity; since, transient as our life is, we may yet find the objects of our fondest regard still more transientⁿ."]

^m Isai. xl. 6—8. This would be proper to insist on, if it were the funeral of a young person.

ⁿ If this were a *Funeral Sermon* for an eminently *pious* person, his views and conduct might with propriety be stated here.

DCLXXV.

THE DUTY OF PRAISING GOD.

Ps. civ. 33, 34. *I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live: I will sing praise to my God while I have my being. My meditation of him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the Lord.*

IT is well that we have in the Holy Scriptures a record of the experience of former saints: for, on the one hand, we should be inclined to rest in low attainments, if we did not know to what heights others had attained; and, on the other hand, we should be condemned for aiming at such exalted frames as were possessed by them, if we had not the sanction of their high authority. However, whether the world be pleased or displeased, this, God helping me, shall be my resolution; and I recommend it to every one of you as your own; "I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live; I will praise my God while I have my being!"

From the words before us, we may learn,

I. What was the frame of David's mind—

1. It was a frame most becoming—

[Such was the frame of man when he came out of his Creator's hands: and such to this hour would it have continued, if he had not sinned. "Praise is comely for the upright^a;" and "it becometh well the just to be thankful." Such a state, as far as their nature will admit of it, befits every creature that God has formed. All the hosts of heaven, and all the inhabitants of the earth, every creature in the universe, rational and irrational, animate and inanimate, are distinctly called upon by the Psalmist, to present unto God, according to their capacity, their tribute of praise^b— — And, if such a state becomes them *as creatures*, that are merely formed by God's hand, and supported by his care, what should be our state, *as redeemed* by the blood of his only-begotten Son? Well may it be said, "Let them give thanks, whom the Lord hath redeemed."]

2. It was a most delightful frame—

[We cannot conceive of David but as exquisitely happy, when he penned these memorable words. Indeed he tells us elsewhere, how rich a source of happiness he found it to his soul: "My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips^c." It is, in truth, the felicity of heaven itself, where "they rest not day nor night, singing salvation to God and the Lamb for ever and ever."]

3. It was a frame which it is our bounden duty also to attain—

[The commands of God to this effect are clear and positive: "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice^d." "Rejoice evermore^e." Provision was made for the exercise of this grace under the Jewish dispensation: feasts were appointed expressly for it; and every member of each family was to rejoice before the Lord, the old and the young, the master and the servant, and even the stranger that happened to be sojourning among them^f. And ought not we, who live under the more liberal dispensation of the Gospel, to rejoice? Methinks there should be no end of our joy: the resolution of David in the text should be ours; and we should be carrying it into effect all the day long. Nor should untoward circumstances of any kind rob us of our joy; but we should say, with the Church of old, "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the

^a Ps. cxlvii. 1.

^b Ps. cxlviii. 1—13. Cite it at full length.

^c Ps. lxxiii. 5.

^d Phil. iv. 4.

^e 1 Thess. v. 16.

^f Deut. xvi. 13—15.

fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation^g.”]

Nor need we despair of resembling David; since he points out, in our text,

II. The way in which it may be attained—

As he attained it, so should we,

1. By meditation—

[His “meditations on God were sweet,” though in the psalm before us, they related only to the creation and providence of God. But the minuteness with which he describes all these things clearly shews what delight he found in surveying every particular which might illustrate his subject. What delight, then, should we feel in contemplating all the wonders of redemption! Of these there is no end. In meditating on these, we should soon be constrained to say, “How precious are thy thoughts to me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee^h.” Let us, then, address ourselves to this holy employment. Let us say, with David, “I will remember the works of the Lord; surely I will remember thy wonders of old. I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doingsⁱ.”]

2. By resolving to rest in nothing short of it—

[We do well to say, ‘I will fear the Lord;’ and well to say, ‘I will serve him.’ But these are far below our duty. We should aspire after higher attainments than these: we should say, with David, “I will be glad in the Lord:” ‘I will never be satisfied, till I have such views of his excellency, and such a sense of his love, that I can rejoice in him, yea, till I can rejoice in him all the day.’ Men attain not this, because they do not aim at it. They are contented with lower acquirements; and hence they know but little of delight in God. O beloved Brethren! I would have “your hearts to be lifted up in the ways of the Lord.” Why should any of you be strangers to this holy frame? Why should you not “sing in the ways of the Lord,” as others have done before you? I know, indeed, that you cannot of yourselves create these heavenly joys: but I know what God has said; “They shall praise the Lord that seek him:” and if you set yourselves in earnest to enjoy him, you shall receive from him “the Spirit of adoption,” whereby you shall be able to call him Father; and have “the witness of the Spirit,” whereby you shall know that you are his children.

^g Hab. iii. 17, 18. ^h Ps. cxxxix. 17, 18. ⁱ Ps. lxxvii. 11, 12.

Thus walking in the light of his countenance here, you shall have an earnest and a foretaste of your heavenly bliss.]

APPLICATION—

[I beseech you, Brethren, live not so far below your privileges as Christians in general are wont to live. How much happier might you be, if you lived near to God in the contemplation of his excellencies, and in the delightful exercise of prayer and praise! This should be the very bent of your mind from day to day, and it should continue to be so to the latest hour of your life. True, indeed, this cannot be expected, unless you embrace him and cleave unto him as *your* God. First learn to say to him, “O God, thou art *my* God!” and then you will find no difficulty in adding, “Early will I seek thee^k.” Then will praise be, as it were, the natural language of your heart, and the constant employment of your lives¹. Then in death, also, will your soul be joyful in your God: and “an abundant entrance will be ministered unto you into the realms of bliss,” where, to all eternity, you shall know no other feeling than that of joy, no other language than that of praise.]

^k Ps. lxxiii. 1.

¹ Ps. cxlv. 1, 2. and cxlvi. 1, 2.

DCLXXVI.

THE CHRISTIAN'S DESIRE.

Ps. cvi. 4, 5. *Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people: O visit me with thy salvation; that I may see the good of thy chosen; that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation; that I may glory with thine inheritance!*

THE Psalms, though in many parts historical, doctrinal, and preceptive, may yet be considered as differing materially from the rest of the inspired volume, inasmuch as, while other books of Scripture *inculcate* religion, these *exemplify* its operations on the heart.

The words before us express the fervent desires of David's heart; and give occasion for observing, that,
I. The lot of God's people is truly desirable—

God “bears a peculiar favour” towards them—

[He esteems them as “his chosen,” “his people,” “his inheritance^a,” and shews the same tender regard towards them as he did towards Israel of old; guiding, protecting, and even bearing them as on eagles' wings^b. Hence that congratulation

^a 1 Pet. ii. 9.

^b Deut. xxxii. 9—13. Isai. lxxiii. 9.

given them by Moses, a congratulation applicable to them in every age and place^c.]

He gives them to enjoy the truest “good”—

[The enemies of God often possess the greatest share of this world's goods^d: but his own people have that which is really good^e, and which shall endure when all sublunary things are come to an end^f. He “visits them with salvation,” which comprehends every solid good, whether for soul or body, whether for time or eternity.]

He fills them with “gladness” and holy “glorying”—

[They are not indeed always joyful, because they have much, both within and without, which may well occasionally produce sorrow^g: but they have seasons of joy, and sometimes are enabled to rejoice with joy unspeakable^h. Even in the midst of tribulations they can often gloryⁱ, and shew to all around them, that they have supports and consolations which the world can neither give nor take away^k. But what gladness and glorying will they have, when all grounds of sorrow shall be finally removed^l!]

Surely such a state is the most excellent on earth: and therefore,

II. To desire a participation of it, is a laudable ambition—

The fervent petitions in the text were, doubtless, acceptable to God—

[Every man naturally desires his own happiness: nor is this species of self-love ever wrong, except when it leads us to seek the end by improper means. When “salvation” is the object of our wishes, we cannot covet it too earnestly: God himself has taught us to pray for it, and to urge our petitions with an importunity that will take no denial^m. And the answers which he gave to Davidⁿ and others in the days of old, sufficiently evince, that he is a prayer-hearing God^o, and that “he delighteth in the prayer of the upright^p.”]

Nor can we please God more than by pleading with him after David's example—

[There is nothing so great, but we may freely ask it at the hands of God. Nor is there any thing so peculiar to the

^c Deut. xxxiii. 29. ^d Ps. xvii. 14. and lxxiii. 7.

^e Isai. lv. 2. ^f Prov. viii. 18. ^g 1 Pet. i. 6.

^h 1 Pet. i. 8. ⁱ Rom. v. 3. ^k Ps. xciv. 19.

^l Isai. xxxv. 10. and lx. 19, 20.

^m Luke xviii. 1. Ps. lxxxix. 10. Isai. xlv. 11.

ⁿ Ps. xxxiv. 6. and cxxxviii. 3.

^o Ps. lxxv. 2.

^p Prov. xv. 8.

saints, but we may ask it *as sinners*, and be certain of obtaining it, provided we ask in humility and faith. Salvation especially, with all its attendant joys and blessings, he is ready to give unto all that call upon him. Let us then beg of him to impart it to us. And let us particularly bear in mind, that we must first be “visited with his salvation,” before we can “see the good of his chosen, and glory with his inheritance.” It is through the knowledge of Him, as our Saviour and Redeemer, that we are to be made partakers of all other blessings. In vain do we hope to have fellowship with his people in their felicity, unless we first have fellowship with him in his salvation^q.]

ADDRESS—

1. To those who are grasping after this world—

[All persons are apt to think that this world can make them happy: but David and Solomon, who enjoyed all that the world could give them, found all to be vanity and vexation of spirit. Let not us then follow the beaten track, but rather aspire after a good that never cloy, an inheritance that never fades^r.]

2. To those who are sincerely, though faintly, pursuing the path assigned them—

[We need not fear a disappointment on account of any unworthiness in ourselves. Let us beg of God to “remember us,” and he will remember us. Let us seek “his favour” in Christ Jesus, and he will be ever ready to grant it. Only let us prosecute this end steadily, and without wavering: so shall we attain the object of our desires, and glory with God’s inheritance” for ever and ever.]

^q 1 John i. 3.

^r 1 Pet. i. 4.

DCLXXVII.

THE EFFECTS WHICH NATIONAL MERCIES SHOULD PRODUCE
ON US.

Ps. cvi. 10—12. *He saved them from the hand of him that hated them, and redeemed them from the hand of the enemy. And the waters covered their enemies: there was not one of them left. Then believed they his words; they sang his praises.*

GRATITUDE for mercies received is a duty universally approved. Every one sees the propriety of acknowledging personal obligations; nor is it less incumbent on us to be thankful for blessings conferred on us in our national capacity. The words before us record the conduct of the Israelites when a signal deliverance had been vouchsafed to them: may we

be as devoutly, and more abidingly impressed, while we consider,

I. The mercy vouchsafed unto them—

They had been in a state of extreme danger and distress—

[After their departure from Egypt they encamped by the Red Sea; there they were hemmed in by impassable mountains and morasses. Pharaoh, greatly incensed, followed them with all his hosts, nor doubted but that he should speedily destroy them all. They, to all appearance, had no means either of escape or self-defence, and in this situation expected nothing but instant ruin.]

But God vouchsafed them a most astonishing deliverance—

[He prevented the nearer approach of Pharaoh by interposing a thick cloud between the Israelites and the Egyptians. He made a path across the sea, the waters standing as a wall on either side: he led his people through it as on dry land. Giving up Pharaoh to judicial blindness and obduracy, he suffered him, at the head of his army, to follow the hosts of Israel; but, when the Israelites were passed over, he let loose the waves upon their pursuers: thus in an instant were the Egyptian armies overwhelmed, and Israel saw their enemies dead upon the sea-shore. How wonderful was this interposition of the Deity, and how great the obligation conferred by it!]

Nor were they at the time insensible of the kindness manifested to them:

II. The effects produced by it—

They had shewed themselves an ungrateful and unbelieving people—

But now, for a season, they were greatly changed:

1. They believed God's word—

[They had had reason enough before to believe the promises made to them: Moses had confirmed his word by many stupendous miracles; but they no sooner came into difficulty than they renewed their murmurs. Now, however, they were forced to confess the power and faithfulness of God, nor did they suppose that they should ever yield to unbelief again.]

2. They sang his praise—

[The salvation afforded them was inexpressibly great, and the hand of God in it was too visible to be overlooked: however therefore they might pity the individuals who perished, they could not but rejoice in their own safety, nor could they

refrain from praising him who had wrought their deliverance ; the most obdurate could not but feel ; the most insensible could not but admire. Happy would it have been for them if they had always continued in this mind ; but though, through frailty, they soon relinquished this heavenly temper, the effect, while it lasted, was good and suitable.]

IMPROVEMENT—

1. Let us endeavour to get our minds duly impressed with the *temporal* deliverances vouchsafed to us *as a nation*—

[We must be blind indeed if we see not the hand of God in the repeated victories which we have lately gained : though they have not been either so miraculous or so complete as that recorded in the text, they demand our most grateful acknowledgments. Had they been as numerous and decisive in favour of our enemies as they have been on our part, we should before this time have seen this land the theatre of war. Let us then praise and adore our God for his interposition on our behalf ; nor let us soon forget the wonders he has wrought for us ; let us rather turn to him in an humble dependence on his mercy ; Let us plead the promises he has made to all penitent and believing people ; and let us, in faith and penitence, expect the accomplishment of his word.]

2. Let us take occasion also to bless him for the *spiritual* deliverance wrought for us *as individuals*—

[Our danger from the broken law was far greater than from human foes : there was no possible method of escape, if God had not interposed for us ; but he has opened a way for us through the death of his own Son, and utterly vanquished all the enemies of our salvation. Let every heart and every tongue unite in his praise ; nor let the remembrance of his mercy be ever effaced from our minds, but let his word, whereby he encourages sinners, be our hope ; then shall every fresh victory be a pledge of future triumphs, and the final destruction of our enemies be the subject of eternal praise.]

DCLXXVIII.

THE EVIL AND DANGER OF INGRATITUDE.

Ps. cvi. 21—23. *They forgat God their Saviour, which had done great things in Egypt ; wondrous works in the land of Ham, and terrible things by the Red Sea. Therefore he said that he would destroy them, had not Moses his chosen stood before him in the breach, to turn away his wrath, lest he should destroy them.*

THERE is scarcely any sin more strongly reprobated in the Scripture than ingratitude. In the catalogue which the Apostle gives us of the crimes committed by the heathen world, unthankfulness to God is particularly specified as one of the most heinous and inexcusable^a. And the judgments denounced against one of the most eminent saints for a single instance of it, indisputably prove, how hateful it must be in the sight of God^b. In improving the instance recorded in the text, we shall,

I. Consider the history referred to—

[The history to which our text alludes is so well known, as not to need many words either to record or explain it. There were mercies vouchsafed to the Israelites in Egypt, such as never had been experienced before from the foundation of the world — — — But they presently forgot their almighty Deliverer, and worshipped a golden calf in his stead. This justly excited the indignation of God, and determined him to destroy them. But Moses, having already fasted forty days and nights, fell down before God, and, during forty more days and nights, neither ate nor drank, but interceded on behalf of this rebellious people. God in answer to his intercession averted the stroke, and forbore to punish them according to their deserts^c.]

II. Apply it to existing circumstances—

[We need not recall to your minds what great things God has lately done for *us* also in Egypt^d. Except in the history of the Jewish nation, there is scarcely any victory recorded in the annals of the world that was more glorious or complete than that vouchsafed to us. Yet how have we requited the Lord? At first, like the Jews, we were willing to give God the glory, and to sing his praise: but has not the impression worn off? and have we not shamefully “forgotten our Benefactor?” — — — Well might God’s anger wax hot against us, to consume us for such ingratitude — — — Nor can we ascribe it to any thing but the intercessions of God’s people that his wrath has not burst forth against us, as against Korah and his company, to destroy us utterly.]

III. Deduce from it some suitable observations—

OBSERVE,

1. The duty of secret intercession—

[We are commanded to pray for all men, and especially

^a Rom. i. 21. ^b 2 Chron. xxxii. 25. ^c Exod. xxxii. 8—14.

^d This was the first fast-day after Lord Nelson’s victory near *the Nile*, 1800.

for kings and all that are in authority. Yea, even in Babylon, were the Jews taught to pray for the peace and prosperity of their very oppressors: how much more then should we intercede for our native country, where we enjoy every liberty that we can desire! Let it not be said, that our governors do not deserve our prayers; for the injunction to pray for kings was delivered in the reign of Nero, than whom a more wicked prince could not exist. Let us then make a conscience of this duty; for if we know not to intercede for others, we have no reason to think that we have ever yet seen aright the value of our own souls.]

2. The benefit of public fasts—

[The honour God has put upon public fasts is well known to all; and his answers to united supplications have been as signal as the hand of God could make them. The victory given to Jehoshaphat^e, the respite to Nineveh^f, and the deliverance to Peter the very day before his intended destruction^g, sufficiently evince, that God will hear the united prayers of his people. Indeed, if one man, Moses, so prevailed for the saving of a whole nation, what deliverance should not nations receive, if they would all unite in prayer! If a few individuals alone mourn for the land, they shall have at least some tokens of peculiar favour to themselves, though they should not succeed in averting God's anger from the nation at large^h. But if there be not some to stand in the breach, it cannot fail but that we must be overwhelmedⁱ.]

3. The guilt and danger of neglecting Christ—

[Great as were the mercies vouchsafed to the Jews in Egypt, they are not to be compared with the redemption which we have experienced through Christ: as our bondage was infinitely more grievous, so the means used to effect our deliverance, infinitely enhance the value of the deliverance itself; we are bought with blood, and that blood was the blood of our incarnate God — — — What destruction then must not we expect if we should forget “God our Saviour^k?” — — — Nor is it the intercession of others that shall ever prevail to avert it from us; we must pray, every one of us for himself: not but that mutual intercession may in this respect be productive of great benefits. Let us then “bear his great goodness in remembrance,” and let it be our song in time, as it shall be through all eternity.]

^e 2 Chron. xx. 12, 15. ^f Jonah iii. 10. ^g Acts xii. 5—8.

^h Ezek. ix. 4, 6. Zeph. iii. 18.

ⁱ Ezek. xxii. 31, 32. Amos. vi. 1, 6.

^k Heb. ii. 3.

DCLXXIX.

THE ZEAL OF PHINEHAS COMMENDED.

Ps. cvi. 30. *Then stood up Phinehas, and executed judgment; and so the plague was stayed^a.*

TO enter profitably into this subject, it will be necessary that I state, in few words, the history to which my text refers.

Balaam had been invited by Balak, King of Moab, to come and curse Israel, whose approach he dreaded, and whom he hoped by these means to subdue. Balaam, "coveting the wages of unrighteousness," thought to enrich himself by executing the wishes of the king of Moab; but was overruled by God to bless the very people whom he was hired to curse. Accordingly he was dismissed without the expected reward. But, with a view of obtaining the promised recompence, he struck out another way in which Balak might ultimately gain his end. He knew, that, if Israel could be ensnared to cast off their allegiance to God, they might lose his protection, and thus fall an easy prey to their enemies. He advised therefore, that Balak should facilitate an intercourse between the Moabitish women and Israel; and thus draw the people of Israel into an illicit connexion with them. And this once established, the Israelites would, in all probability, be led to attend the Moabitish women to their sacred feasts; and thus, by conforming to their habits, they would, in a short time, be seduced to a participation with them in their idolatrous rites.

In this advice Balaam had but too well succeeded; and almost the whole of Israel were thus drawn into the sins of fornication and idolatry: to punish which, Jehovah had inflicted on them a plague, whereby no less than three and twenty thousand Israelites were slain. To avert the anger of the Most High, Moses issued an order, that the judges of Israel should "slay all those who had joined themselves to Baal-Peor, the god of Moab, and hang them up

^a Numb. xxv. 13. "He was zealous for his God, and made an atonement for the children of Israel," would be a good text for this sermon.

before the Lord against the sun." In this way one thousand more were slain. Yet behold, whilst vengeance was thus executing upon the offenders, a prince of one of the tribes brought a Midianitish princess, in the very sight of Moses and of the whole congregation, to his tent, defying, as it were, the indignation both of God and man, and setting at nought all regard even to common decency: and it was on this occasion that Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron the high-priest, rose up from his place, and followed them to their tent, and with his javelin pierced both of them through their bodies in the very act of sin: and thus, making, as it were, an atonement to the Divine justice, he prevailed with the Deity to stop the plague.

Now this act of his being very highly commended in the Scriptures, and being replete with instruction proper to this occasion^b, I shall point out,

I. The importance of zeal in a general view.

II. The excellence of it as displayed in the history before us.

I. Zeal in itself may be either good or bad according to the object to which it is directed. Hence the Apostle limits his commendation of it by this particular consideration; "It is good to be zealously affected always *in a good thing*." If exercised in a bad cause, it only precipitates a person to the commission of greater evil: but, when put forth in the prosecution of a good object, it facilitates the attainment of the end proposed. Without zeal, nothing that is at all difficult can be accomplished. From whatever our indifference arise, it can never succeed in any arduous undertaking. If we be indolent in study, we can never make any great proficiency either in art or science. There may be, it is true, a brightness of genius which shall enable a person to shine amongst his fellows without much labour: but he will be

^b An *Assize Sermon*, at Cambridge, March 12, 1831, just after riotous combinations against agricultural machinery, together with most destructive incendiarism, which had prevailed in many parts of the country, were put down by a special commission at Winchester.

altogether superficial in his knowledge, and will soon betray his want of diligence by the slenderness of his attainments. The same will be found true in every department of life. It is “the diligent hand alone that maketh rich.” It is not always found indeed that labour, however great, is crowned with success: but where eminence in any arduous pursuit is attained, we may be sure that great zeal has been exercised in the prosecution of it. Who ever enlightened the world with discoveries in philosophy, without having first devoted much time to study, and laboured hard for the furnishing and enriching of his own mind? Even success in attainments of a lower order is not gained without much previous exertion in that particular line in which the effort is made. In the Grecian games, for instance, a long course of self-denying labour was necessary to enable any man to rise above his competitors, and to secure the distinction at which he aimed. So in every thing, if a man would either benefit others, or distinguish himself, he must put forth zeal in the prosecution of the end which he has in view. Had Phinehas not felt more deeply than others the dishonour done to God, and stirred himself more resolutely to avenge his cause, he had neither turned away God’s wrath from Israel, nor obtained for himself the commendation given him. It was his zeal for God that put him forth beyond all others, and that has rendered him an example to mankind to the remotest ages of the world.

This zeal of his forms the chief subject of our present discourse, and therefore we shall point out,

II. The excellence of it as displayed in the history before us.

To view his conduct aright, we must consider him as performing *a magisterial act of piety towards man*, and *a ministerial act of piety towards God*; in both which points of view it is highly commended to us by God himself.

See it as a magisterial act of justice towards man.

Magistrates are appointed by Almighty God as his vicegerents in the government of the world. They

are set over their fellow-creatures for the preservation of order, to give protection to the peaceable, and to punish those who, by any evil deeds, would interrupt the welfare of the community. They are to exercise authority for him; being his ministers for good to the people over whom they are placed; nor are they to bear the sword in vain, but to be “re-vengeurs in his name to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil^c.”

Now it is obvious that when iniquity abounds, and is sanctioned and upheld, not only by the multitude, but by persons of distinction and power, it is no easy matter for a magistrate to discharge his duty aright. On the one hand, he is afraid of appearing singular, and of having his interposition ascribed to unworthy motives; and, on the other hand, he is apprehensive that he shall fail in his efforts to withstand the evils which he deplures. He sees others, perhaps, as willing as himself to lament the reigning corruption, but not willing to incur the odium of standing forth as reformers, and of exerting their power for the correction of it. He knows how much more ready all will be to blame his zeal, than to commend it: and therefore he is disposed rather to wait till he can find others to co-operate with him, than by extraordinary and unaided efforts to put to shame those who draw back from their duty, and are destitute of that zeal which he feels it incumbent on him to employ.

This was the state of Phinehas. He was but a young man, and therefore might be condemned as officious, and unbecomingly obtrusive. The offenders too were persons of the highest rank in the nations to which they belonged: and the elder rulers, who, together with him, were witnesses of this horrible impiety, were all either intimidated or stupified; so that not one of them felt disposed to avenge the cause of Israel and of God on these flagrant transgressors. But he would not wait for others. He would discharge his duty at all events; and whatever

^c Rom. xiii. 1—4.

others might either say or do, he would approve himself to God as an active magistrate, and a conscientious servant of the Most High. That he did not go forth as one who was not authorized to execute the laws, is evident from the commendation given to him both by God and man: and therefore he stands as a pattern for all magistrates to discharge their official duties manfully, without favour and without fear.

What a blessing such magistrates are to any land, may be seen in the benefits which, by that one act, Phinehas obtained for the whole nation of Israel. On his executing of judgment, the plague was stayed. Four and twenty thousand, in the whole, had perished in one day; and, had he delayed to discharge his duty in this matter till his brethren in office should join him, no one can tell how many thousands more would have fallen a sacrifice to the wrath of God. But by this act of his he “made atonement for the children of Israel,” and “averted God’s wrath from them.” He arrested also the progress of iniquity; and obtained for himself the highest honours, even “the covenant of an everlasting priesthood:” and “this act of his was counted to him for righteousness unto all generations for evermore^d.”

We are not to suppose that this act formed his justifying righteousness before God; for not all the obedience of the best of men could ever avail for *that*: but it proved to all future generations that he was a righteous man, and that no consideration under heaven could deter him from a faithful discharge of his duties, whether to God or man.

Now such a blessing are conscientious magistrates in every age and in every land: and they who boldly maintain the authority of the laws, however they may be traduced and calumniated for a season, are, indeed, the most honourable members of society, and, sooner or later, will receive the approbation of every considerate man. The obligations we owe to such are, at this moment, seen and felt through the

^d ver. 31.

land, in the suppression of outrage, and in the diminution of the terrors diffused through the whole country by reckless and desperate incendiaries. And I cannot but hope that the firmness manifested both by the *civil* and *legal* powers IN OUR SISTER ISLE^e, will be attended with a similar blessing from the Most High. *It is right, it is necessary, that law should rule:* and, if it cannot be upheld, but by the exercise of severity towards those who would trample it under their feet, it is right that those who set it at nought should be made victims of their own folly and wickedness. I say again, *the law must rule*; and neither the many nor the great are to set it aside. And if in the suppression of evil somewhat of laxity prevailed amongst us for a season, that time is past, and shall not readily, I hope, return again. The whole people of the land, though but too easily wrought upon by factious demagogues, are yet in their cooler moments united firmly in this one sentiment, that, if not even the King himself can rule but according to law, neither factious demagogues, nor an excited populace, are to be suffered to rule contrary to law. This is acknowledged now through all the grades of society; and, I trust, will ever be maintained amongst us by those whose office it is, whether as magistrates or jurors, to administer justice, and to uphold and execute the laws.

But I observed that this action of Phinehas may also be considered as a ministerial act of piety towards God.

In this light it is placed by God himself: “Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, hath turned my wrath away from the children of Israel, while he was *zealous for my sake* among them, that I consumed not the children of Israel in my jealousy. Wherefore say, Behold, I give unto him my covenant of peace: and he shall have it, and his seed after him, even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood, because he was *zealous for his God*, and *made an atone-*

^e The agitator O’Connell checked by Lord Anglesea and Mr. Stanley, and made to plead guilty.—Jan. 1831.

ment for the children of Israel^f." He was the presumptive heir to the high-priesthood: and with his own hand he here offered an atonement to his offended God, for whose honour he was deeply interested, and whose wrath he laboured to avert. In this *so far as his zeal for God's honour was concerned*, he is a pattern for ministers in all future ages. As to the act itself, *that* was peculiar to the situation and circumstances in which he stood: nor is any man now authorized to follow his example. Not the first man on earth is at liberty to take the law into his own hand, and to execute its sentence in the summary way that he did. Every thing now must be transacted through a legal process, and by officers specially appointed to that end. But the same zeal as animated the soul of Phinehas, should glow in the bosom of every minister of Christ. The aboundings of iniquity should occasion "great heaviness and continual sorrow of heart" in all who serve in God's sanctuary; yea, "rivers of tears should run down their eyes night and day" because of the dishonour which is done to God by a thoughtless and rebellious world.

But to exercise a becoming zeal for God is no easy matter; and any person standing forth, as Phinehas, to stem the torrent of wickedness which flows around him, will be exposed to much obloquy as a bold fanatical enthusiast. In every age such ministers have "been for signs and for wonders" in the Church of God. At the time of the deluge we hear of but one person, Noah, who dared to enter his protest against the impiety of the world around him. In Elijah's time, though there were seven thousand who were not addicted to the reigning sin, there was but one who openly declaimed against it. And so it is now. There are doubtless many thousands of persons in the land, both of ministers and people, who withstand in secret the corruptions of the world; but yet any man, who, like Phinehas, should stand up with becoming zeal to arrest the progress of iniquity,

^f Numb. xxv. 11—13.

would be accounted “ a troubler of our Israel,” and be condemned for his needless, his insufferable, preciseness. But whence is this? It is owing to the lukewarmness of the generality, and not to any undue energy in those who serve the Lord. Of all people under heaven, a minister of Christ is most bound to exert himself in the cause of his Divine Master. Ministers are intended to be “ lights in a dark world ;” yea, they are “ the salt of the earth,” which, by its influence, is destined to keep the whole world from corruption. Nor ought any consideration either of hope or of fear to sway them in the least. They should be unmoved by seductions of any kind, and should be ready to lay down their own lives for the honour of God, and the welfare of their fellow-creatures. Yes, this is the sacrifice which they should be ready to make: for so says the holy Apostle: “ If I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all: do ye also joy and rejoice with me^g.” Here the Apostle considers his converts as an offering to God: and, as libations were poured forth upon the offerings, he accounted his heart’s blood as a proper libation to be poured forth for them; and the shedding of it an occasion for most unqualified joy.

For the averting of God’s wrath, it is true, we can offer no atonement. But we can speak of an atonement which has been offered, even that once offered by our blessed Lord upon the cross; and that is a sufficient “ propitiation for the sins of the whole world.” But how shall I speak of that? If we admire the zeal of Phinehas, who offered to God an atonement by the sacrifice of *the offenders*, what shall I say of our great High-Priest, who has made an atonement by the sacrifice of *himself*, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God? Here was zeal indeed, and “ a love that passeth knowledge.” But by this it is that God is pacified towards us. There is, alas! a *moral* plague prevailing throughout our whole camp, and slaying its tens of thousands in

^g Phil. ii. 17, 18.

a day. But by means of this atonement we are empowered both to arrest its progress, and to take away its guilt.

And need I say, that such ministers are a blessing in the land? Truly they are a blessing, and shall be accounted so as long as the world shall stand. What if, like Phinehas, they overstep the bounds observed by their more lukewarm fellows? They shall, like him, be honoured both by God and man; whilst the memory of less faithful ministers shall pass away into oblivion, like a morning cloud. Their zeal shall be counted to them for righteousness to the latest ages: not for their justifying righteousness, as I have before observed; for in Christ alone can that righteousness be found, and from him it must be received by faith alone: but, as an evidence of their piety, it shall be counted to them, and be a ground of praise and thanksgiving to God amongst all who shall be called to imitate their bright example.

What then do I look for on this occasion? I call for zeal, even for the zeal of Phinehas, in all the magistrates, and in all the ministers, of our land. In Phinehas these offices were united; as in some instances they are amongst ourselves; though I think, for the most part, unhappily and unwisely. A minister, instead of affecting a double occupation, should rather say, with our blessed Lord, "Who made me a ruler and a judge over you?" And sure I am, that, if a minister will give himself entirely to his own proper work, he will find enough to occupy all his time and all his thoughts. The offices of the magistracy and the ministry are perfectly distinct. Magistrates have to uphold and enforce the laws of man; ministers have to propagate the glorious gospel of the blessed God. The office of the magistrate has respect to the temporal welfare of mankind; the office of a minister is to promote, in every possible way, their spiritual and eternal interests. Still, however, there should be in both a cordial and energetic co-operation for the honour of God, and for the good of man. A minister often needs the support of

magisterial authority, and should find it promptly exerted for him when occasion requires. On the other hand, the magistrate, whose office is rather for the suppression of evil than the inculcation of good, needs the aid of ministers, for the effecting of an entire change in the sentiments and habits of the community. Let each, therefore, be found in the faithful discharge of their respective duties; so may we hope that God's wrath shall be averted from our guilty land, and that his covenant blessings shall be poured forth upon us through eternal ages.

I cannot close my subject without briefly observing, that we all have within the camp of our own hearts many corruptions, which have provoked the displeasure of the Most High, and which need to be sought out, and prosecuted, and slain. O that there were in all of us a holy zeal in reference to them, and that we would sacrifice them to God with an unsparing hand! It is said of "all that truly belong to Christ, that they have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." Can we appeal to God that this is our character? Do our lives bear witness to us, that whilst the great mass of the community care for nothing beyond the pleasures, the riches, the honours, of the world, and those who should stand forth as champions for God, are lukewarm and timid in his sacred cause, *we* dare to be singular, and firm and zealous in the discharge of our respective duties, and, above all, in the devotion of our souls to God? Truly we should all, if I may so express myself, begin at home. God has at this moment a controversy with the whole nation. And, though magistrates and ministers may do much to correct the abuses which prevail in external matters, *that* will be of little avail to pacify our offended God. God looks at the heart. *That* must be humbled for our past iniquities, and purged from the allowed indulgence of any sin. Yea, *that* must be consecrated to God, with all its faculties and all its powers: it must first be cleansed in the blood of Christ, and then be sanctified by his Spirit. Then shall the chastising hand of

God be removed from us, in our individual capacity at least, if not collectively as a nation: and, at all events, his eternal judgments shall be averted from us, and all the blessings of his covenant be our everlasting portion. This is the plague which, after all, we are most interested in removing, even “the plague of our own hearts;” and this once removed by faith in the Lord Jesus, and by the influences of his Spirit, we shall have the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and stand accepted of our God for ever and ever.

DCLXXX.

PRAISE TO GOD FOR HIS MERCIES.

Ps. cvi. 48. *Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting! and let all the people say, Amen. Praise ye the Lord!*

WE find in the world almost an universal prejudice against religion, as a source of melancholy. And more especially if the wickedness of man be portrayed in very deep colours, it is supposed that we shall drive all our hearers to despair. But where shall we find the sins of Israel more awfully depicted, than in the psalm before us? Yet, how is it closed? with weepings and with wailings? No: but with as devout an ascription of praise as is to be found in all the inspired volume. The truth is, that nothing so elevates the soul as a contrasted view of God’s mercies and our own vileness: and no man will build so high a superstructure of praise, as he who digs deepest into the corruptions of his own heart, and lays his foundation broadest on God’s sovereign grace in Christ Jesus. Behold, then, I pray you,
I. The ebullition of heart here manifested!

What is it that the Psalmist has been contemplating?

[He give us, in the psalm, an epitome of the conduct of all Israel, from the time of their coming out of Egypt to the time of David^a. He mentions their provoking of God at the Red Sea, their lusting after sensual gratifications, their mutinying

^a See 1 Chron. xvi. 35, 36.

against his vicegerents, their worshipping of the molten calf, their contempt of the Promised Land, their joining with the Moabites and Midianites in the worship of Baal-peor, their quarrelling with Moses at Kadesh; and, finally, their incorporating themselves with the Canaanites, and imitating their idolatrous and cruel customs.

But together with all this, he shews how graciously God had dealt with them: for though he had inflicted many and sore judgments upon them, he had not yet finally forsaken them; but, for his own name sake, and for the sake of the covenant which he had made with them, he still continued to them his tender mercies.]

And was not all this a ground for praise and thanksgiving?

[Methinks it was not possible for any one who duly considered the subjects here brought before him, to feel otherwise than as the Psalmist himself felt on the occasion. For, had God taken them in this manner from the midst of another nation, and multiplied his mercies to them to such an extent, and for so many hundreds of years, in the midst of all their rebellions; and shall they not “bless him?” Had he so shewn himself both “*the God of Israel*” and “*a God to Israel*,” and shall they not adore him? Shall they not desire that all should be alike impressed with a sense of these mercies, and that God should be alike glorified in all and by all? Methinks, when it was said, “Let all the people say, Amen,” there was not one dissentient or silent voice in the midst of them. Indeed, we are expressly told that “they *did* all say, Amen; and praised the Lord^b.” And, if there had been one who refused to unite in this tribute of praise, he might well have been separated from the congregation, as a curse to the Church, and as unworthy to be numbered amongst the Lord’s people.]

From hence, then, we may clearly see,

II. The corresponding feeling which it should generate in us—

We have experienced an infinitely greater redemption than they—

[Theirs was from temporal bondage, which, at all events, must have been ere long terminated by death: ours is from the chains of sin and Satan, death and hell — — — Theirs was by power only: ours is by price as well as power, even by the inestimable price of our Redeemer’s blood^c — — —]

And, notwithstanding this, we have been as rebellious as ever they were—

^b See the preceding reference.

^c 1 Pet. i. 18, 19.

[Were our sins noted in a book, as theirs are, we should be found to have been as perverse and obstinate as they. In truth, their history is a mirror, wherein the countenance of the whole Christian world shines as clearly as the sun at noon-day. They are the very prototype, to which we are perfectly conformed; yes, and with incomparably greater guilt than they, inasmuch as our obligations to God are infinitely greater than theirs — — —]

Yet is God more merciful to us than ever he was to them—

[True, he has at times visited us with judgments: but he has never cast us off, or “shut up his loving-kindness in displeasure.” On the contrary, he still follows us with offers of mercy through his beloved Son, and importunes us to accept of reconciliation with him through the blood that was shed for us upon the cross — — —]

What, then, should be *our* sense of gratitude towards him!

[If the Israelites were called to bless him as “the God of Israel,” how much more should we bless him as “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” and our God and Father in him! If they were called to bless him in a review of his conduct towards *them*, how much more may we, in reference to his conduct towards *us*! If every one of the people was to utter *his* “Amen” at the giving of thanks to God, what shall be said of *us*, if there be one amongst us who shall shew reluctance to unite in this holy exercise? Methinks “the very stones would cry out against him.” To every one of you, then, I say with confidence, bear your part with us: and when we say, “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting,” let every one of you, without exception, “say, Amen, Amen, Amen!” yes, with one heart and one voice, I say to all, without exception, “Praise ye the Lord.”]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are not yet liberated from their bondage—

[Such there were in the days of Saul and of David, who were in captivity among the heathen. And how would it be possible for them to unite with their brethren in Jerusalem in these songs of praise? “How could they sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?” Hence they pray, “Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from among the heathen, *to give thanks unto thy name, and to triumph in thy praise*!”^d The same prayer I recommend to you. I know you cannot rise to this devout and holy frame whilst you are under bondage to guilt

^d ver. 47.

and fear and evil habits: it is impossible you should. But, if once you obtain reconciliation with God, and, “by a spirit of adoption, are enabled to call him Father,” then will your mouth be opened to sing his praise; and you will desire that every child of man should join with you in that blest employment.]

2. Those who have been brought into “the liberty of the children of God”—

[To *you* this song of praise is nothing more than the prevailing expression of your feelings before God. To bless and magnify your God, is the joy of your soul: and you are ready to obey the call, when God’s ministers invite you to unite in that holy exercise. Behold, then, I now say, “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel! and let every one of you say, Amen.” Say it, then; say it cordially; say it devoutly. We are told, that when the Christians of the primitive Churches said Amen, so general and so earnest was the utterance given to that word, that the sound was like thunder. I will not pretend to say what their circumstances might call for; nor will I sit in judgment upon those of whom I know so little. But *at this day*, I confess, I should prefer a more quiet expression of our feelings and our desires. I am not fond of vociferation in prayer; nor do I like a noisy piety. I prefer what is intimated in that delicate expression of the Psalmist: “Praise is silent before thee, O Lord^e.” But let God hear “*your breathing and your cry^f*,” and doubt not but that He will accept it at your hands; and, by the efforts which you make to praise him now, will he prepare you to join in everlasting “Hallelujahs” in the realms above.]

^e Ps. lxxv. 1. The Hebrew, as mentioned in the margin.

^f Lam. iii. 56.

DCLXXXI.

PRAISE TO GOD FOR REDEMPTION.

Ps. cvii. 1—3. *O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy; and gathered them out of the lands, from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south.*

THE intent of this psalm appears to be, not merely to display the providence of God as interposing in all the concerns of men, but especially the goodness of God in vouchsafing to hear the prayers of men, and to grant them deliverance in answer to their suppli-

cations. This is illustrated under a variety of interesting images. His interpositions are described in behalf of travellers lost, but conducted home in safety; of prisoners rescued from merited captivity; of persons sick and dying, restored to health; of mariners preserved, and brought to their desired haven. But we must not confine our attention to *temporal* deliverances only; for it is manifest in the very commencement of the psalm that respect is had to the goodness and mercy of God in their most extended operations, and especially in the great work of redemption: for it is “from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south,” that he has already gathered his redeemed people^a, and that he will yet gather them into the kingdom of his Messiah^b, even “Shiloh, unto whom shall the gathering of the people be^c.” In considering the different images, we might notice both the temporal and spiritual deliverances which they severally refer to: but at present we shall wave all reference to them, and notice only the great work of redemption, as set forth in the words before us; wherein we see,

I. The duty of all to give thanks to God—

Consider,

1. The grounds of it—

[Wherever we turn our eyes, we cannot but see that “the Lord is *good*.” Survey the heavenly bodies, and contemplate the benefits derived from them: view the earth with its innumerable productions for the good of man: examine your corporeal frame, and think how every part performs its office for the benefit of the whole: above all, reflect on the powers and faculties of our immortal souls, and mark how by them we are elevated above all the rest of the creation, and fitted for an infinitely higher state of existence in the presence of our God: and then say whether we have not reason to proclaim the goodness of our God— — —

But the “mercy” of our God is yet, if possible, a more stupendous object of admiration; because goodness manifested itself to us in innocence; whereas mercy is exercised towards us under an unconceivable load of guilt. Think how it was displayed to man at first, in promising him a Saviour: think

^a Matt. viii. 11. ^b Isai. xliii. 5, 6. and lvi. 8. ^c Gen. xlix. 10.

how it wrought in due time, in sending that Saviour into the world, even the eternal Son of God, and in laying all our iniquities on him. Think how it has shewn itself to every individual amongst us, in bearing with all our iniquities, and in following us with offers of a free and full salvation. Think how it has lasted towards the children of men, and how it shall last towards all who embrace its gracious offers. Surely if our minds were affected as they ought to be with this wonderful subject, we should never cease to praise and adore our God — — —]

2. The duty itself—

["O give thanks unto the Lord" for these things, all of you, old and young, rich and poor, one with another! If there be one amongst us that has not participated in these benefits, we will be content that he shall be silent: but the very circumstance that we are still on mercy's ground is abundant evidence that we have reason to join in one universal song of praise and thanksgiving. Think of the fallen angels, who never had a Saviour provided for them: think of the millions of the human race who never heard of the Saviour that has been provided for them, or that, having heard of him, have been left to perish in a neglect of his salvation: think of these things, and then, if you can, deny your obligations to the goodness and mercy of your God — — —]

But let us more especially consider,

II. The peculiar obligations of the redeemed to do so—

"Let the redeemed of the Lord say so:" yes, if ye "whom he has delivered out of the hand of the enemy, and gathered to himself," are silent, "the very stones will cry out against you." Think,

1. From whence you have been gathered—

[The remotest ends of the earth are not so far from each other, as ye were from God — — — and in this state ye were led captive by the devil at his will — — —]

2. By what means ye were redeemed—

[It was by the precious blood of God's only dear Son^d — — — It was also by the effectual working of his power: for he, as a good Shepherd, sought you out, and apprehended you, and brought you home on his shoulders rejoicing^e — — —]

3. To what ye are brought—

[As the Lord's redeemed people, ye are brought into a state of peace with God: ye have the privilege of constant communion with him: ye may expect at his hands every

^d Eph. ii. 13.

^e Ezek. xxxiv. 12. Luke xv. 5.

blessing which your souls can desire : and ye shall finally possess all the glory and felicity of heaven.

Think now what, in the view of these things, should be the state of *your* minds. If those who have never yet experienced one of these benefits, have yet abundant reason to celebrate the goodness and mercy of their God, have not *ye* much more ? O “ let the redeemed of the Lord say so : ” let them sing his praises day and night : let them adore him with their whole hearts — — —]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are yet insensible of God’s goodness—

[Alas ! how great a portion of every assembly are comprehended under this description ! — — — Well, know ye then that we require no other proof of your perishing condition. Tell us not from what sins ye are free : we will grant all that ye are pleased to say : but we declare you to be blind, ignorant, base, ungrateful creatures : ye have no hearts to adore your God ; and therefore if ye die in your present state, ye can never enter into the kingdom of heaven, where the one employment of the blest inhabitants is to sing the praises of redeeming love. If ever ye be truly converted unto God, this new song will be put into your mouths, and be sung by you day and night^f — — —]

2. Those who love the blessed work—

[Some there are, and may God increase their number an hundredfold ! who delight to bless and praise their God — — — Go on then, dearly Beloved, and abound more and more. Though your songs are as yet but faint, they are truly pleasing in the ears of your reconciled God and Father. This song in particular is grateful to him. Mark what notice he took of it when sung by Solomon^g — — — So will he come down and fill your souls with his glory — — — Mark also what honour he put upon it when sung by Jehoshaphat^h — — — So will he defeat all the confederacies, whether of earth or hell, that may be formed against you — — — Sing on then with increasing gratitude, even to the end ; and soon shall the golden harp be put into your hands, and you shall join with that heavenly choir in that more perfect song in which they all unite, even in singing, “ Salvation to God and to the Lamb for ever and ever.”]

^f Ps. xl. 1—3. with Jer. xxxiii. 11.

^g 2 Chron. v. 13.

^h 2 Chron. xx. 21, 22.

DCLXXXII.

THE DUTY AND GROUNDS OF PRAISE.

Ps. cvii. 8, 9. *Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! for he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness.*

AMONG the various graces which characterize the true Christian, that of gratitude to God is very conspicuous. Others indeed will confess their obligations to the Supreme Being; but none are duly sensible of them, till they have been renewed by the Holy Spirit. When once we have “tasted that the Lord is gracious,” and been impressed with a sense of redeeming love, we shall view the goodness of God in all his dispensations; and, not only glorify him ourselves, but earnestly desire that all should render him the honour due unto his name. This disposition was eminently displayed in David, when he penned the Psalm before us. No less than four times does he repeat the fervent wish, that men would praise the Lord: and at each time does he suggest the most ample grounds for the performance of that duty.

From his words we shall take occasion to consider,
I. The duty here recommended—

Wherever a superior being is acknowledged, there a tribute of prayer and praise is considered as due to him. The light of revelation confirms this general sentiment; and expressly inculcates thanksgiving to God as an universal duty. The manner in which the Psalmist urges us to praise our heavenly Benefactor, deserves peculiar attention: it speaks more forcibly than the strongest injunction could have done; and intimates that praise is,

1. An indispensable duty—

[Praise is the external expression, whereby a soul, filled with admiration and gratitude, gives vent to its feelings towards its heavenly Benefactor. It is an exercise of which the glorified saints and angels are never weary^a; and in which we enjoy a foretaste of heaven itself^b— — Words can scarcely convey

^a Rev. iv. 8, 9.

^b 1 Pet. i. 8. *χαρᾷ ἐδόξαμεν.*

a more sublime idea of this employment, than those by which David describes its effects upon the soul^c — — — In this view he strongly recommends it to us, and we may also recommend it to each other, as “*good, pleasant, and comely*”^d. It is a duty which we owe to God. There is not any precept in the Bible more plain than those which relate to this subject^e — — — There is not any duty, the neglect of which is represented in a more heinous light^f — — — On the other hand, there is not any religious act of which more honourable mention is made than this^g — — — Nor any to which, *if accompanied by a suitable deportment*, more exalted privileges are annexed^h — — — Hence it is, that thirteen times in the space of six short verses, David renews his exhortations to every living creature to praise the Lordⁱ.]

2. A much neglected duty—

[Whatever blessings men enjoy, they rest in the gift, and forget the Giver. In fact, we scarcely know the value of our blessings till we are bereaved of them. The generality of men, instead of acknowledging with gratitude God’s kindness towards them, and requiting him according to the benefits he has vouchsafed to them, take occasion from his mercies to sin the more against him — — — Not even the godly themselves abound in this holy employment as we might expect. Many, alas! live at so great a distance from God, that they can scarcely ever rise above a petition for mercy, or, at most, a sense of thankfulness that he has not utterly cast them off. They cannot soar to a contemplation of the divine perfections, or of the excellency of Christ, or of the blessedness of those mansions that are prepared for them. They have so much of the world in their hearts, and so little faith, that they cannot realize their principles, or glorify God in any measure as they ought. Instead of cultivating the devout spirit of David^k, they rest satisfied in a lukewarm state, saying, “It is high; I cannot attain unto it!” Yes; though there are some who delight themselves in God; yet, in reference to the greater part even of real Christians we must say with sorrow and regret, “O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and *according to his excellent greatness*”^m!]

To stir up ourselves to a due performance of this duty, let us consider,

II. The grounds proposed for the performance of it—

^c Ps. lxxiii. 5. ^d Ps. cxlvii. 1. ^e 1 Thess. v. 18. Eph. v. 20.

^f It is the strongest mark of an ungodly state, Rom. i. 21; and a certain ground of eternal condemnation, Deut. xxviii. 45, 47.

^g It glorifies God, Ps. l. 23.

^h Ps. l. 23.

ⁱ Ps. cl.

^k Ps. lxxiii. 3, 4. and cxix. 164.

^l Ps. cxxxix. 6.

^m Ps. cl. 2.

There is nothing that may not in some view or other be made a ground of praise and thanksgiving. In the text we are led to notice,

1. Those which are general—

[The goodness of God, as manifested in the wonderful dispensations of his providence, is that which first offers itself to our consideration. How bountifully does he supply the returning wants of his creatures even while they are continuing in rebellion against him! How marvellously has he preserved us in life from our earliest infancy to this day; and kept in tune, as it were, in the midst of continual shocks and dangers, an instrument of ten thousand strings! With what kindness has he restrained the evil dispositions of men, which, if suffered to rage without control, would produce a very hell upon earthⁿ! As for the godly, they would soon be extirpated from the face of the earth, if the sons of Belial were permitted to execute all that is in their hearts. And who amongst us would not have perpetrated many more evils than he has, if God had not imposed an invisible restraint upon him, and diverted him from his purpose^o?

But on this occasion^p we must particularly call to mind the wonders God has wrought for us, in preserving us from domestic tumults and foreign invasions; and in making us victorious, when our allies have been all subdued, or have even combined against us with the common enemy for our destruction. In a more especial manner should we admire the goodness of God in so suddenly disposing the hearts of our enemies to peace, and in bringing the calamities both of war and scarcity to a happy termination.

The riches of his grace are also deserving of the deepest attention. Surely it is not possible to overlook the wonderful work of redemption which God has wrought for sinful man. What shall I say of the gift of his only-begotten Son to die for us? — — — What of the gift of his Holy Spirit to instruct and sanctify us? — — — What of all the promises of grace and mercy and peace to the believing soul? — — — And what of that eternal inheritance he has prepared for us in heaven? Truly he dealt not so with the fallen angels: but to “the children of men” he has communicated richer blessings than words can declare, or that any finite imagination can conceive.

ⁿ In proof of this we need only look back to the slaughters and massacres, the rapes and ravages, and all the other horrors of the French Revolution.

^o See the instances of Abimelech, Gen. xx. 6; of Laban, Gen. xxxi. 24; of David, 1 Sam. xxv. 32—34.

^p The peace in October, 1801. In lieu of this, any particular mercies, which the season suggests, may be specified.

And should we not praise him for *these*? If we are silent on subjects like these, verily our mouths will be shut in the day that our ingratitude shall be punished by our indignant God.]

2. Those which are more particularly specified as vouchsafed to “the longing and hungry soul”—

[Under the image of a weary traveller rescued from the deepest distress, and brought beyond all expectation to the rest he had desired, the Psalmist represents a soul hungering and thirsting after righteousness, and raised from a state of despondency to the full enjoyment of its God. Thousands there are who are reduced to great perplexity in the pursuit of heaven. They feel their guilty and perishing condition; but how to extricate themselves from the wilderness of this world, and to find their way to the city of habitation, they know not. Having tried in vain those self-righteous methods of escape which their own reason has suggested, they cry at last to God, and implore his guidance. He, ever ready to hear the prayer of the poor destitute, “reveals his dear Son in their hearts:” he shews them that in Christ is their hope, in Christ is their refuge, in Christ is their security. Being thus led to Christ, their “longing souls are satisfied, their hungry souls are filled with goodness” — — — Who can conceive what *satisfaction* a soul feels, when Christ is thus revealed to it as “the way, the truth, and the life?” And I wish you particularly to notice how God marks with approbation *not our attainments* only, but *our very desires*. “Longing and hunger” are the very lowest operations and effects of grace in the soul: yet does God delight in *them*, and magnify his mercy towards those in whom even these slight beginnings of what is good are seen.

And is not *this* a ground of praise? If any who have experienced such mercies “should hold their peace,” methinks Sodom and Gomorrha will rise up in judgment against them. The more we contemplate redeeming love, the more will a sacred ardour glow within our bosoms to bless and praise the Lord⁴.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who never praise God at all—

[What enemies are such persons both to their present and future happiness! How much richer enjoyment would they now have of all God’s mercies, if they could discern his hand in them, and taste his love! And how much happier would they be in the eternal world! for, can it be supposed that God will bestow heaven indiscriminately on the evil and unthankful together with the good and thankful? Can it be thought that a man who was more insensible of favours than an ox or an ass⁵, shall instantly on his dismissal from the body begin to adore

⁴ ver. 43.

⁵ Isai. i. 3.

his God, and to join in those celestial anthems for which he had not the smallest taste? No: we must begin on earth the work we are to carry on in heaven: nor can we hope to participate the felicity of the saints, if we have not first cultivated their disposition, and found delight in their employment.]

2. Those who desire and endeavour to praise him—

[While some find their hearts enlarged in praising God, we trust there are many who say, O that I *could* praise the Lord for his goodness! But whence is it that, with a desire to enjoy God, so many spend their days in sighing and mourning instead of in joy and rejoicing? Perhaps they pore over their own corruptions without contemplating the divine attributes: they look at themselves more than at Christ: they consider their own wants; but overlook the Lord's promises: they anticipate future difficulties, without adverting to past deliverances: in short, they cannot praise God as they would wish, because they are forgetful of those benefits which are the occasions and grounds of praise. Let all such persons then be aware of their error. Let them begin this day the important, the delightful, the long-neglected work. Let them unite in praising God for his mercies, whether public or personal, whether temporal or eternal.

To all would we say, in the energetic language of the Psalmist, "O sing praises unto the Lord, sing praises; sing praises unto the Lord, sing praises; sing ye praises with understanding^s." "Let young men and maidens, old men and children, praise the name of the Lord; for his name alone is excellent, his glory is above the earth and heavens^t."]]

^s Ps. xlvii. 6, 7.

^t Ps. cxlviii. 12, 13.

DCLXXXIII.

GOD'S LOVE SEEN IN ALL HIS DISPENSATIONS.

Ps. cvii. 43. *Whoso is wise and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord.*

TO know God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent, is the highest privilege and perfection of man. This attainment, infinitely beyond all others, constitutes true wisdom. But to acquire this knowledge, it is necessary that we study well, not the book of Revelation only, but the records also of God's providential dealings with mankind. The Word and works of God mutually reflect light on each other; and the more extensive and accurate our observation is of those things which occur from day to day, the

more just will be our apprehension of God's nature and perfections. True indeed it is, that, as far as theory is concerned, we may learn every thing from the Scripture alone: for in the world and in the Church we can find only a repetition of those things which are recorded in the Sacred Volume: but a practical sense of God's love is greatly furthered by the constant exhibition of it which may be seen in his dealings with us; so that we may well say with the Psalmist, "Whoso is wise and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord."

We propose to shew,

I. What those things are which are here presented to our notice—

To enter fully into them, we should distinctly consider the different representations which are here given of God's merciful interposition in behalf of bewildered travellers, incarcerated prisoners, dying invalids, and mariners reduced to the lowest ebb of despondency. But instead of minutely prosecuting those different inquiries^a, we will draw your attention to the two principal points which pervade the whole; namely,

1. The timely succour which he affords to the distressed—

[The instances mentioned in the psalm are only a few out of the numberless interpositions which God vouchsafes to men in distress: but whatever be the trouble from which we are delivered, it is of infinite importance that we see the hand of God both in the trouble itself and in the deliverance from it. There is neither good nor evil in a city, but it must be traced to God as its author. Whether men or devils be the agents, it matters not; they can do nothing without a special licence from God himself: and hence, when men had plundered Job of all his possessions, and Satan had destroyed all his children, he equally ascribed the different events to God; "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away." Thus must we do: we

^a If this subject were used as a *Thanksgiving after a Storm*, or *after a Recovery from Sickness*, the particular circumstances should here be noticed, with an especial reference to that part of the psalm that is proper to the occasion.

must ascribe nothing to chance, and nothing to the creature, *except as an instrument in the hands of God*. If the folly or malignity of man injure us, or the wisdom or benevolence of man repair the injury, we must look through the second causes, and fix our eyes on God, as the first great Cause of all. If we see not God *in* the dispensations, of course we shall learn nothing of God *from* them: but if we behold his agency in them, then will our eyes be opened to see his wisdom and goodness also.]

2. His condescending attention to their prayers—

[In all the instances specified in this psalm, God's interpositions are mentioned as answers to prayer: "They cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses." Many, alas! of the prayers which are offered in seasons of difficulty and distress have respect to nothing more than the particular occasion, and are accompanied with no real desire after God: yet even these prayers God often condescends to hear, just as he did the prayers in which Ahab deprecated the judgments denounced against him. But when the prayers proceed from a penitent and contrite heart, and are offered up in the prevailing name of Jesus Christ, God will hear them at all times and under all circumstances. We do not say that the precise thing which may be asked shall certainly be granted; because God may see that, on the whole, *that* would not prove a blessing to the person who asks it: but no prayer that is offered up in faith shall go forth in vain: it shall surely be answered, if not in the way expected or desired, at least in a way that shall ultimately prove most conducive to the good of him that offers it.]

These things being matters of daily occurrence, we shall proceed to mark,

II. The benefit arising from an attentive consideration of them—

From these we shall be led to notice, not merely the agency of God in all the concerns of man, but especially, and above all, his "loving-kindness" also. This will be seen,

1. In the darkest dispensations of his providence—

[God's dearest children are not more exempt from trials than others: on the contrary, they are often most subjected to them. But in this the loving-kindness of God is especially manifest: for by their trials he leads them to more fervent prayer; that prayer brings to them more signal interpositions; and those interpositions fill them with joy, far overbalancing all the troubles they have endured. Let any child of God look

back to his former life, and say, whether the events which once he regarded as the heaviest calamities, have not been overruled for his greatest good? Yes: it is not David only, but every child of God, that must say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." We may indeed, like Jacob, say for a time, "All these things are against me:" but when we have seen "*the end*" and issue of the dispensation, we shall confess that "the Lord has been pitiful to us, and of tender mercy^b." If we view an insulated and individual occurrence, we may be perplexed respecting it; but if we view it in connexion with all that has preceded and followed it, we shall be able to set our seal to the truth of that promise, "All things shall work together for good to them that love God." Whatever then be the affliction under which we are suffering, let us never for a moment lose sight of that truth, "Whom the Lord *loveth*, he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth."]

2. In the most painful operations of his grace—

[The different circumstances adduced for the illustration of God's providence may not unfitly be regarded as images to shadow forth also the operations of his grace. Truly in them we may see the wants and miseries, the helplessness and terrors, of an awakened soul. Who that knows any thing of his own state has not seen himself a wanderer from the ways of God, and perishing for lack of knowledge? Who has not groaned, and bitterly too, under the chains of sin by which he has been tied and bound? Who has not felt his inability to help himself, as much as if he had been dying of an incurable disorder? And who has not seen himself sinking, as it were, into the bottomless abyss, and been almost "at his wit's end," because he saw not how his soul could be saved? We do not mean to intimate, that all converted persons have felt these things in an equal degree: but all have felt them sufficiently to see the suitableness of these images to their own experience. What then shall we say? Does God, in suffering them to be so exercised, mark his displeasure against them? No: it is love, and love alone, that he manifests. Multitudes of others he leaves to follow their own evil ways without fear, and without remorse: but those whom he loves he awakens from their security: he sends his Holy Spirit to convince them of sin; he stirs them up to fervent prayer; and then, in answer to their prayers, he speaks peace to their souls. "Those troubles were not at the time joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterwards they yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness unto them that are exercised thereby."]

ADVICE—

1. View the hand of God in every thing—

^b Jam. v. 11.

[Things may be called great or small by comparison; but, in fact, there is nothing small, when considered in relation to the possible events which may spring from it. The opening of the book precisely in the place where the services of Mordecai to Ahasuerus were recorded, was as much a work of God as any other that is contained in the Sacred Volume^c: and the circumstances connected with it were of incalculable importance to the whole Jewish nation. Let nothing then be accounted small: but receive every thing as *from* God, and endeavour to improve every thing *for* him: and then shall every thing enrich you with wisdom, and inflame your souls with gratitude and love.]

2. Take occasion from every thing to spread your wants before him in prayer—

[The great, the universal remedy, to which we should have recourse, is Prayer. Prayer will turn every thing to gold. Whether our trials be of a temporal or spiritual nature, they cannot fail of proving blessings if only they drive us to a throne of grace. The direction of God himself is, that “in every thing we should make our requests known to him:” and, on our doing so, we are assured, that “the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus^d.” “If we call upon him in the time of trouble, he will hear us,” and turn all our complaints into praise and thanksgiving.]

3. Give him the glory of all the deliverances you receive—

[On all the different occasions mentioned in the psalm, it is said, “O that men would therefore praise the Lord for his goodness!” This is the tribute which all of us are called to pay; and the very end which God proposes to himself, both in our trials and deliverances, is, to make us sensible of his goodness, and to draw forth from us the tribute of a grateful heart. “Whoso offereth him praise, glorifieth him.” See to it then that your daily mercies call forth suitable returns of love and gratitude: and thus will you be preparing gradually for that blessed day, when all the mysterious designs of God, which now you could not penetrate, shall be unravelled, and all your sorrows terminate in endless joy.]

^c Esth. vi. 1—3.

^d Phil. iv. 6, 7.

DCLXXXIV.

THE PERSON AND OFFICES OF CHRIST.

Ps. cx. 1—7. *The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule*

thou in the midst of thine enemies. Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning : thou hast the dew of thy youth. The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek. The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath. He shall judge among the heathen : he shall fill the places with the dead bodies ; he shall wound the heads over many countries. He shall drink of the brook in the way : therefore shall he lift up the head.

IN some of the Psalms, David speaks of himself only ; in others, of himself and of the Messiah too ; but in this, of the Messiah exclusively : not a word is applicable to any one else. The Jews have taken great pains to explain it away : but their attempts are, and ever must be, in vain.

In the first verse, David relates the Father's address to his Son, when "the council of peace was held between them : " and the whole of the remainder is addressed by the Psalmist to the Messiah himself. It altogether elucidates in a very striking manner the character of Christ.

In it are set forth,

I. His person—

It is of great importance that we have just views of the Divinity of Christ—

[On that depends the sufficiency of the atonement which he has offered for the sins of men. If he be only a creature, how can we be assured that the shedding of his blood has any more virtue and efficacy than the blood of bulls and goats? What proportion is there between the transitory sufferings of one creature, and the accumulated sins of all the children of men? How can we conceive that there should be such a value in the blood of any created being, as to purchase for a ruined world a deliverance from everlasting misery, and a possession of everlasting happiness and glory? But if our Redeemer be God as well as man, then we see at once, that, inasmuch as he is an infinitely glorious Being, there is an infinite merit in his obedience unto death, sufficient to justify the demands of law and justice for the sins of all mankind. On any other supposition than that Christ is God, there would be no force at all in that question of the Apostle, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also

freely give us all things^a?" What argument would it be to say, "He that gave us a creature, how shall he not also give us HIMSELF, and all the glory of heaven?" But if Christ be God, equal with the Father, then is the argument clear, obvious, and unanswerable.]

In the psalm before us the divinity of Christ is plainly asserted—

[Our blessed Lord himself appeals to it, in order to confound and silence his malignant adversaries. Both Pharisees and Sadducees had endeavoured to ensnare him by difficult and perplexing questions: and, when he had answered, he put this question to them; "What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he?" and when they said, "The Son of David," he asked them, "How then doth David in Spirit call him LORD, saying, The Lord said unto my LORD, &c.? If David then call him LORD, how is he his son?" And then we are told, "No man was able to answer him a word^b." Had they been willing to acknowledge Christ as their Messiah, they needed not to have been at any loss for an answer; for they knew him to be a son of David; and he had repeatedly declared himself to be God, insomuch that they had again and again taken up stones to stone him for blasphemy. But this passage proved beyond all doubt that the Messiah was to be "the root, as well as the offspring of David;" the LORD of David, as well as David's son.

And here it is worthy of notice, that we see in this appeal what was the interpretation which the Jews of that day put upon the psalm before us. *They all understood it as relating to the Messiah*: and all the attempts of modern Jews to put any other construction upon it are futile in the extreme.

But by comparing the parallel passage in St. Mark, we see what the Jews of that day thought of the doctrine of the Trinity^c. Our Lord speaks of the Holy Ghost as inspiring David, (which none but Jehovah could do,) to declare what Jehovah the Father had said to Jehovah the Son. If the doctrine of the Trinity had not been received among them, would they have been silent, and not known what to answer him? And would they from this time have been deterred by it from asking him any more questions?

Be it known then, that Christ is very God, and very man: he is that "Word, who was in the beginning with God, and was God^d;" "God manifest in the flesh^e." He is, as the prophet calls him, "the Mighty God^f," or, as St. Paul calls him, "the Great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ^g," "God over all blessed for ever^h."]

^a Rom. viii. 32.

^b Matt. xxii. 41—46.

^c Mark xii. 35—37.

^d John. i. 1, 14.

^e 1 Tim. iii. 16.

^f Isai. ix. 6.

^g Tit. ii. 13.

^h Rom. ix. 5.

The Psalmist now addressing himself to the Messiah, proclaims to him the success that should attend him in the execution of,

II. His offices—

The second and third verses may undoubtedly be applied to his regal office, because they speak of his “ruling in the midst of his enemies:” but, if we consider how his victories are gained, namely, by his word and Spirit, and that it is by the illumination of men’s minds that he subdues their hearts, we shall see that this part of the psalm may properly be understood as relating to his prophetic character. Accordingly we behold him here represented as,

1. A Prophet—

[The word is “the rod of his strength,” by which he works all the wonders of his grace. In itself it is as weak and inefficient as the rod of Moses, whereby he wrought all his miracles in Egypt; but, as applied by the Spirit of God to the souls of men, it is “quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword,” and “is mighty to the pulling down of all the strongholds” of sin and Satan: “it is the power of God unto salvation to all them that believeⁱ.” It “came forth from Zion, even the word of the Lord from Jerusalem^k,” when it was published by the holy Apostles; who delivered it, as they were commanded, to Jerusalem first, and then to other parts of the world. And there is this remarkable difference between the victories gained by it, and those gained by any carnal weapon: by the latter, men are brought to a reluctant submission; by the former, they are “made willing,” truly and cordially willing, to take Christ’s yoke upon them. Whenever the Lord’s time, the “day of his power,” is come, they, like the rams of Nebaioth, present themselves as voluntary sacrifices at God’s altar, and give up themselves unreservedly to the Lord^l.

Nor is deliverance from death and hell the only object of their pursuit: they feel, that they can be happy only in the way of holiness; and therefore “in the beauties of holiness” they come unto him: their dispositions and habits are all changed: they abstain from sin, because they hate it; and obey the law, because they love it: and, could they obtain the desire of their hearts, they would be “holy as God is holy,” and “perfect, even as their Father in heaven is perfect.”

ⁱ Rom. i. 16.

^k Isai. ii. 3.

^l Compare that beautiful passage Isai. lx. 4—8. with Rom. xii. 1. and 2 Cor. viii. 5.

The numbers that shall thus be converted to the Lord exceed all calculation or conception. As the drops of “dew” issuing from “the womb of the morning,” so will be the progeny that shall be born to him, innumerable: there may be but “an handful of corn cast on the top of the mountains; but yet shall the fruit be as the woods of Lebanon, and as the piles of grass upon the earth^m.” Thus powerfully did his word and Spirit operate in the early “youth” of the Church; and thus shall they operate to the very end of time: and it is worthy of particular observation, that the very first verse of this psalm, with the explanation given of it by the Apostle, was that which pierced the hearts of our Lord’s murderers, and subdued three thousand of them at once to the obedience of faithⁿ.

David now proceeds to speak of Christ as,]

2. A Priest—

[As Christ was to offer a sacrifice for the sins of his people, he must of necessity be a priest. But from the Levitical priesthood, which was confined to the tribe of Levi, he was of necessity excluded, because he was of the tribe of Judah. There was however a priesthood of another order, the order of Melchizedec; and to that he was solemnly consecrated with an oath. What that priesthood was, we should never have known, if it had not been explained to us in the Epistle to the Hebrews. In the Mosaic history, Melchizedec is briefly mentioned, without any account of his predecessors or successors in his office^o: and this was particularly overruled by God, in order that he might be a type of Christ, whose priesthood was from everlasting (in the divine counsels,) and everlastingly to continue in himself alone. Now at the time that the Levitical priesthood was in all its glory, David foretold, that it should be superseded, (and the whole Mosaic economy with it,) by a priesthood of a higher order; a priesthood, which Abraham himself, and all his posterity in him, acknowledged, and which, on account of the solemnity of its appointment, and the perpetuity of its duration, was of a far higher order^p.

Is it inquired, What sacrifice he had to offer? we answer, His own body, which “through the eternal Spirit he offered without spot to God.” And, having offered that sacrifice once for all, he now intercedes for us within the veil; and will come again at the end of the world to bless his redeemed people, and to make them partakers of everlasting blessedness.

But it is foretold yet further, that he was also to be,]

3. A King^q—

^m Ps. lxxii. 16.

ⁿ Acts ii. 34—37.

^o Gen. xiv. 18—20.

^p Read Heb. vii. 1—28.

^q Some, to reconcile ver. 5. with ver. 1. suppose that in ver. 5. David ceases to address the Messiah, and directs his speech to the

[Melchizedec, though a priest, was a king also, and one that was most eminently fitted to typify the Saviour, being "king of righteousness and peace^r." Thus was Christ not a priest only, but "a priest upon his throne^s." Being now exalted to the right hand of God, he "sitteth there, till all his enemies become his footstool." "To him every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall swear" allegiance: or, if any continue to withstand his overtures of mercy, he will smite them to the ground; yea, though they be the greatest monarchs upon earth: "He will strike through kings in the day of his wrath." There is "a day of wrath," as well as a day of mercy; and terrible indeed will be "the wrath of the Lamb." As a mighty conqueror desolates the countries which he overruns, and fills them with the bodies of the slain, so will Jesus in that awful day. If he rule not men by their free consent, as their Lord, he will judge them as rebels, and "wound the heads of all" to the remotest corners of the earth: he will say, "Bring hither those that were mine enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me."

Previous to his own victories, he was himself, according to human estimate, to be overcome. But his humiliation was to pave the way for his exaltation: "by death he was to overcome him that had the power of death, and to deliver from death" his ransomed people. This was the way pointed out in the very first proclamation of mercy to fallen man: "The Seed of the woman was to bruise the serpent's head; but the serpent was first to bruise his heel^t." Accordingly he did "drink of the brook in the way:" he suffered infinitely more than words can express, or the mind of man can conceive; and then "he lifted up the head," and was "exalted far above all principalities and powers," whether of heaven or hell; and he "shall surely reign till all his enemies be put under his feet."]

We cannot improve this subject better than by asking,

1. What think ye of Christ?

[This is the very question which our Lord himself asked in reference to this psalm. Yet it is not a mere theoretical opinion that we ask for, but the practical persuasion of your hearts. Do you view him with reverence and love as your incarnate God? — — — Do you look to him as your Prophet, to teach and guide you into all truth? — — — Do you look to him as your great High Priest, trusting in his all-atoning sacrifice, and imploring an interest in his prevailing intercession?

Father. But this introduces needless perplexity into the subject. If we understand "The Lord at thy right hand," as meaning, *The Lord who is thy strength and thy support*, (which is certainly its most obvious meaning,) the whole speech is uninterrupted and clear.

^r Heb. vii. 2.

^s Zech. vi. 13.

^t Gen. iii. 15.

— — — Do you farther look to him as your King, desiring him to bring, not your actions only, but “your every thought, into captivity” to his sacred will? — — — This is the test whereby you are to try the state of your souls before God; for according to your experience of these things will be your sentence in the day of judgment — — —]

2. What measure have ye of resemblance to him?

[God has ordained that all his people should “be conformed to the image of his Son^u,” in sufferings, in holiness, and in glory. Like him, they must “drink of the brook in the way, and afterwards lift up the head.” “The Captain of our Salvation was made perfect through sufferings;” and “all the sons who shall be brought to glory” must be made perfect in the same way^x: “through much tribulation they must enter into the kingdom of heaven.” The “mortifying of our members upon earth,” with “the cutting off a right hand, and plucking out a right eye,” are strong and significant expressions, shewing clearly, that a life of godliness requires much painful labour and self-denial. Besides, there is much persecution also to be endured from an ungodly world; for “all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” Nor are the conflicts that are to be sustained with all the powers of darkness of small consideration in the Christian’s warfare. Let me ask then, Are ye following Christ in this way? Are ye “crucifying the flesh with the affections and lusts?” Are ye “following him boldly without the camp, bearing his reproach?” Are ye “fighting manfully the good fight of faith,” and “wrestling, not only with flesh and blood, but with all the principalities and powers of hell?” Be assured that “the kingdom of heaven cannot be taken without violence: the violent must take it by force.” The work and offices of Christ will be of no avail in our behalf, if we do not “take up our cross daily and follow him.” Awake then, all of you, to the duties that are assigned you; and be content to suffer with him, that ye may be also glorified together.”]

^u Rom. viii. 29.

^x Heb. ii. 10.

DCLXXXV.

THE GREAT WORK OF REDEMPTION.

Ps. cxi. 2. *The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein.*

THIS psalm is one of those appointed by our Church for Easter Day: for which it is sufficiently appropriate, in that it celebrates that redemption of

God's people from Egypt, which was typical of the redemption wrought out for us by Christ upon the cross, and perfected by his resurrection from the dead. The structure of it is very peculiar. Every sentence begins with the different letters of the Hebrew alphabet in their order; the eight first verses consisting each of two sentences, and the two last of three sentences. This artificial mode of writing it seems to have been with a view to its being more easily remembered. The first word of it, "Hallelujah," was, in fact, no part of the psalm itself, but only the title of it; and it shews us with what disposition of mind the subject should be contemplated, and with what feelings it was recorded. O that our souls might rise to the occasion, whilst we consider,

I. The greatness of God's works!

Great indeed they were, even the deliverances accomplished for Israel in Egypt. Who can read of all the plagues with which that land was visited; or of the destruction of Pharaoh and all his host in the Red Sea; or of the wonders wrought for Israel in the wilderness; or of their final establishment in the land of Canaan; and not exclaim, "Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty!" But, however much we may be disposed, in imitation of David in this psalm, to admire the perfections of God as illustrated in that stupendous work, we are called to the consideration of infinitely greater works, of which the deliverance from Egypt was but a type and shadow. Yes: in the redemption of the world we do indeed behold the perfections of our God shining forth, as it were, in meridian splendour. *That* was a work beyond all parallel and all conception great,

1. In wisdom and power—

[When Moses saw what God had wrought for the people of Israel at the Red Sea, he sang, "Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like unto thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders^a?" But St. Paul speaks of our blessed Lord as concentrating in himself all that is great and glorious, and as being, as it were in the abstract,

^a Exod. xv. 11.

“The wisdom of God, and the power of God^b.” O what unsearchable depths of wisdom were contained in that mystery, the substitution of God’s only dear Son in the place of sinners; whereby the sins of the whole world are expiated, and the kingdom of heaven opened to millions, who, without such a Saviour, must have inherited the blackness of darkness for ever! — — — Nor was the power that effected our redemption less manifest, in forming the human nature of our Lord in the womb of a pure Virgin, free from all the taint of our original corruption; and enabling that body, so wonderfully formed, to bear the curse due to our iniquities, and to work out a righteousness adequate to the wants, and sufficient for the necessities, of a ruined world. View the triumphs of Jesus in the wilderness, and in the garden, and on the cross; in all of which “he spoiled the principalities and powers of hell:” view them also in his resurrection, and ascension, and in the operations of the Holy Spirit, whom he sent from heaven to complete the wonders of his grace: view these things, and say, whether “his work be not indeed honourable and glorious^c,” the very summit of wisdom, and the perfection of power.]

2. In goodness and mercy—

[So conspicuous were these perfections in the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, that David could behold, as it were, nothing else. In a psalm where he specifies a great variety of particulars relating to it, he repeats no less than twenty-six times in as many verses, “His mercy endureth for ever^d.” But what shall we say of his goodness and mercy to us in Christ Jesus? Eternity will be too short to enumerate the instances wherein these perfections are displayed, and to make such acknowledgments as this exhibition of them calls for at our hands. The manna from heaven, and the water from the rock, were but faint images of what we receive in and from the Lord Jesus Christ. O what supplies of grace, what rich communications of his blessed Spirit, does he impart to us from day to day! — — — And what forbearance does he exercise towards us! — — — Well indeed may we say with David, that “goodness and mercy have followed us all our days.”]

3. In righteousness and truth—

[In the whole dispensation, whether towards the Lord Jesus Christ himself, as our representative, or towards us whom he has redeemed, there has not been one single act which was not an act of justice, and an accomplishment of some pre-existing declaration. Were our iniquities laid on the Lord Jesus, and punished in him? Was he, after having expiated those sins, exalted to glory, and seated on the right hand of the

^b 1 Cor. i. 24.

^c ver. 3.

^d Ps. cxxxvi.

Majesty on high? All, as David speaks, “was verity and judgment^e.” In like manner, if we are pardoned, and raised to a participation of his glory, “mercy and truth meet together, and righteousness and peace kiss each other^f.” Every threatening denounced against sin has been executed in the person of Christ; and every thing promised to Christ, or to us, is fulfilled, when for Christ’s sake we are restored to God’s favour, and made heirs of his inheritance — — —]

Agreeable to this character of God’s works is,

II. The respect paid to them by every true Christian.

The Christian is fitly represented as one “who has pleasure in these works” —

[The generality of mankind have, alas! no pleasure in these works, but rather put away the remembrance of them with abhorrence — — — But not so the Christian: he regards them with far different sensations. He indeed is not insensible to pleasures of other kinds, provided they be such as may be enjoyed with a good conscience towards God. He may, as a scholar and philosopher, feel delight in intellectual pursuits; and he may, as a member of society, find pleasure in the intercourse of friendship, or the enjoyment of domestic comforts. But, though he lose not his taste for such pleasures, his delight in them is altogether subordinated to higher and more spiritual enjoyments. Whatever he once accounted gain, is now esteemed by him *comparatively* as dross and dung^g — — — The wonders of redeeming love are on earth, as they will be in heaven, his constant solace, and his song.]

By him they “are sought out” with care and diligence —

[With a view to a more enlarged knowledge of these works, he reads *the Holy Scriptures*, searching into them as for hid treasures — — — He attends carefully on *the ministry* of the word, that he may both obtain a further insight into the Gospel, and have a richer experience of it in his soul — — — By constant *meditation also*, and by fervent *prayer*, he dives deeper and deeper into the great mysteries of godliness; musing, as it were, day and night, and crying mightily to God, “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law!” Never does he imagine that he has yet attained. The more enlarged his views become, the more he sees, that he knows nothing yet as he ought to know: and he looks forward with proportionable earnestness to the eternal world, where the veil shall be taken from before his eyes, and he “will see as he is seen,” and “know even as he is known.”]

^e ver. 7.

^f Ps. lxxxv. 10.

^g Phil. iii. 7, 8.

ADDRESS—

I. Seek yet more and more this most desirable of all knowledge—

[See with what persevering diligence the philosopher prosecutes the attainment of science — — — And will not ye, for the acquiring of knowledge wherein eternal life consists, and “which the angels themselves desire to look into?” — — —]

2. Endeavour more and more to make a suitable improvement of it—

[“Hallelujah” stands as the introduction to the contemplations of David. Let all your contemplations lead to, and terminate in, a similar acclamation. Such *will be* the result of all the knowledge which we shall possess in heaven — — — and such *should be* our improvement of all that we attain on earth — — —]

DCLXXXVI.

THE FEAR OF THE LORD.

Ps. cxi. 10. *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom : a good understanding have all they that do his commandments : His praise endureth for ever.*

OF all attainments that are made by man, wisdom is confessedly the highest : and well does it deserve the highest place in our esteem, because it elevates and ennobles him in whom it is found. This is true even of human wisdom : how much more, then, of that which is divine ! But where shall divine wisdom be found ? or who can ever estimate it aright, when found ? These are questions propounded by holy Job ; and they deserve our most attentive consideration. “Where,” says he, “shall wisdom be found ? and where is the place of understanding ? Man knoweth not the price thereof ; neither is it found in the land of the living. The depth saith, It is not in me : and the sea saith, It is not in me. It cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof. It cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx and the sapphire. The gold and the crystal cannot equal it : and the exchange of it shall not be for jewels of fine gold. No mention shall be made of coral or of pearls : for

the price of wisdom is above rubies. The topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it; neither shall it be valued with pure gold^a." Having stated all this, he again asks the question, "Whence then cometh wisdom? and where is the place of understanding?" He then answers, that it is hid from the eyes of all living: that God alone understandeth it: and that he hath declared *where* and *what* it is: "Unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding^b." Now, rich and determinate as this passage is, it does not equal the declaration of David, who says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever." Here he not only identifies the fear of the Lord with wisdom, but carries on the comparison from the beginning to the end, from the first formation of them in the soul to their final completion in glory.

To enter fully into his meaning, we shall consider the fear of the Lord,

I. As existing in the soul—

"Man is born like a wild ass's colt," and is as destitute of true wisdom as he. "The fear of the Lord is the very beginning of wisdom;" and then only does wisdom exist in the soul, when the fear of the Lord is implanted in it. But,

What do we understand by the fear of the Lord?

[This needs not to be stated at any length, because a very few words will suffice to explain it. The fear of the Lord is here put for true religion; even for such religion as manifests itself by a deep humiliation before God, a simple affiance in the Lord Jesus Christ, and an unreserved obedience to his will. This is well understood amongst you, and therefore needs not to be insisted on. You all know that it does not consist in a mere assent to Christianity as true, or a profession of it as the only true system: you are fully aware that there is comprehended in it a real surrender of ourselves to God as his redeemed people.]

This, when existing in the soul, is true wisdom—

[There is no true wisdom where this fear is not; for

^a Job xxviii. 12—19.

^b Job xxviii. 20, 21, 24, 27, 28.

without this fear, a man *views* nothing aright, and *does* nothing aright. Earthly things have in his eyes an importance which does not properly belong to them — — — and heavenly things are in no respect appreciated according to their real worth — — — But when “God has put his fear into our hearts,” our misconceptions are removed, and our mistakes rectified. Sin is no longer that light and venial evil which we before supposed it to be; nor is salvation judged to be of so small consequence, that we can any longer neglect it. The salvation of the soul becomes from that moment the one thing needful; and all the concerns of time are swallowed up in those of eternity — — — This may be accounted folly: yea, it is so accounted by an ignorant and ungodly world: but God declares it to be wisdom; and such it will prove itself to be in the issue — — —]

But trace it,

II. As operating in the life—

In all its bearings, and in all its operations, the fear of the Lord approves itself to be true wisdom. Mark it as operating,

1. In the different ages and relations of life—

[Of whatever age a person be, whether young or old, the fear of the Lord will dictate to him such a deportment as befits him. And in every relation of life it will exalt his character. Husband or wife, parent or child, master or servant, magistrate or subject, all will know their place; all will fulfil their duties; all will execute their respective offices with care. In nothing will the operation of this principle more clearly appear, than in stimulating every one to discharge with diligence and propriety the duties of his own peculiar calling — — —]

2. In the different circumstances in which it may be placed—

[Are we in prosperity? this will keep us humble, and watchful against the temptations to which prosperity will expose us. Are we in adversity of any kind? this will support us from fainting and murmuring, on the one hand; and from a contemptuous apathy on the other. It will cause us to acknowledge a divine agency in every thing that occurs: and to make such an improvement of it, as that God may be glorified in all.

Of course, I must not be understood to say that the fear of the Lord will enlarge a man's intellectual powers, any more than it will increase his bodily stature; at least, not to such a degree as to divest a man of his natural weakness. A man who is of slender capacity will continue so; and he will be liable to misapprehensions as arising out of that circumstance. A person of a weak mind will betray that weakness in any thing that may

engage his attention: and, if it betray itself in his religious deportment, it will be very unjust to ascribe that to religion which proceeds only from his own imbecility, and would equally shew itself in any other occupation or pursuit. But this I will say, that this divine principle will go far to direct him, where his judgment, not so regulated, would err: and that, consequently, he will on the whole excel in wisdom those whose capacity and attainments are in other respects on a level with his own. I will further say, that, in proportion as he advances in true piety, his profiting in wisdom also will appear unto all.]

Let us view this principle yet further,

III. As completed in a better world—

The applause which ungodly men gain from their blind companions is of very short continuance. But that which piety secures will endure for ever.

The man who fears the Lord is not without applause in this world—

[What if he be derided by some? it is only by those who know not what true wisdom is: and who, if they acted in reference to earthly things as they do in relation to their heavenly concerns, would themselves be regarded by all mankind as fools and idiots. By every man whose good opinion is worth having, the godly man is loved and honoured — — — yea, and God himself also honours him with the richest manifestations of his presence and love — — —]

And how is he honoured in the eternal world!—

[Thither the angels of God bear him on their wings, exulting in the office assigned to them of ministering unto him. And no sooner is he arrived at the portals of heaven, than he is welcomed by God himself, who, in the presence of all the heavenly host, addresses him, “Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.” Behold the crown prepared for him! the throne also made ready for his reception! Behold the kingdom awarded to him as his inheritance, of which he takes possession as an “heir of God, and joint-heir with Christ!” Yes, truly, this is his praise; and will be so when they who here despised him shall “awake to shame and everlasting contempt.” “This praise, too, endureth for ever.” Whilst his once contemptuous enemies are “weeping and wailing and gnashing their teeth” in hell, he will be in the full enjoyment of glory and honour and immortality, in the bosom of his God.]

ADDRESS—

I. Those who despise religion—

[Whence is it that ye despise it? Your contempt of it is altogether founded on your own ignorance and wickedness.

“Satan has blinded your eyes,” and hardened your hearts, and is “leading you captive at his will.” And how long, think you, will you retain your present opinions? If God Almighty ever have mercy on your soul, your eyes will be opened to see your folly and impiety: but, if this mercy never be vouchsafed to you, not a minute will intervene between your departure hence and a total change of your views. You will then be perfectly like-minded with those whom you now despise: but who can express the regret which you will then feel at the review of your conduct? But then your regrets will be in vain: your day of grace will have for ever passed away; and you will for ever reap the bitter fruits of your wickedness — — —]

2. Those who are afraid of confessing Christ by reason of the contempt which they shall thereby encounter—

[It was not thus that your Saviour dealt with you. He knew to what shame and ignominy he should be exposed for you; and yet, “for the joy of saving your souls, he endured the cross and despised the shame, and is now set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” The same blessed issue is reserved for you also, if you approve yourselves faithful unto him: “If you deny him, he will deny you:” but, if you submit willingly to “suffer with him, you shall also be glorified together.” Regard not, then, the scoffs of an ungodly world; but “rejoice rather that you are counted worthy to endure them.” But, after all, what is it that you are afraid of? an unkind look? an opprobrious name? or the finger of scorn? Truly you have but little pretence to wisdom, if by such things as these you can be deterred from confessing Him who lived and died for you.]

3. Those who by reason of indiscretion “give occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully”—

[It is greatly to be lamented that all who profess godliness do not act so wisely as they ought. There are many who, by the extravagance of their notions, or the absurdity of their deportment, cause religion itself to be reproached, and “the way of truth to be evil spoken of.” But I must declare to all such professors, that they incur a fearful responsibility before God; and that for every one who falls over the stumbling-blocks which are thus laid in his way, they must give account in the day of judgment. See to it then, Brethren, that ye “walk in wisdom towards those that are without;” and that instead of giving occasion of offence by any unwise conduct on your part, ye “put to silence the ignorance of foolish men by your well-doing.” Never forget that *wisdom is identified with religion*. It

° Rom. viii. 17. and 2 Tim. ii. 12.

admits of nothing that is foolish or extravagant in any respect. Prudence, sobriety, soundness of judgment, and true discretion, are inseparable from it: and if we would adorn our profession, or be accepted of our God, we must “walk wisely before him in a perfect way^d.”]

^d Ps. ci. 2.

DCLXXXVII.

GREATNESS AND CONDESCENSION OF GOD.

Ps. cxiii. 5—8. *Who is like unto the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high, who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth! He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill; that he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people.*

VERILY, God is to be praised: “from the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same, his name” should be glorious: “He is above all blessing and praise.” Whether we consider what he is in himself, or what he is to us, we cannot but exclaim, “Who is like unto the Lord?” If men be not filled with admiring and adoring thoughts of him, it is because they know him not, neither contemplate him: but we can scarcely fail of being in some measure suitably impressed with his excellency, if we consider those perfections of his which are set before us in our text:

I. His greatness—

[But how shall we convey any idea of this? If we speak of created things, however great, we can give some kind of statement, which, though very inadequate, will convey a slight notion at least of the subject. However great the disparity between a monarch and a worm, or between the globe and a grain of sand, there is something whereon we may ground a comparison between them, and something to which we may affix tolerably definite ideas. But between the Creator and the creature there is no point of contact. If we attempt to declare his immensity, and say, that in all the boundless regions of space God is every where, and as entirely present in every different spot as if he were no where in the universe besides, what are we the nearer to any just apprehension of him? Our intellect is not capable of conceiving of him aright. Were a peasant told respecting the motions and distances and mutual dependence of the heavenly bodies, how much of it would he understand? It would be far

above his comprehension: he could not embrace any part of the system. So, if we presume to speak of the greatness and incomprehensibility of Jehovah, we only “darken counsel by words without knowledge:” “it is a knowledge too wonderful for us; we cannot attain unto it.” The sentiments of Zophar on this subject are well worthy of our attention: “Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty to perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea^a.” And Elihu, another of Job’s friends, exactly to the same purpose says, “Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out^b.” Sometimes indeed God is pleased to give us some little glimpse of his majesty; light enough, if we may so speak, to make our darkness visible. Thus by the Prophet Isaiah he asks, “Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance? Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance; he taketh up the isles as a very little thing. All nations before him are as nothing, and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity.” He then adds, “To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him^c?” The Psalmist also, with exquisite beauty, thus sets forth the glory of his majesty: “O Lord my God, thou art very great: thou art clothed with honour and majesty: who coverest thyself with light as with a garment; who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain; who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters; who maketh the clouds his chariot; who walketh upon the wings of the wind; who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire^d.” But, after all, what idea does this description give us of Him, who “fillet all things,” “whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain?” We are altogether at a loss on so mysterious a subject; which therefore we close with that declaration of the Psalmist, “His greatness is unsearchable^e.”]

But though we can add nothing to what is said in the words before our text, “The Lord is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens,” yet we see in this what will serve to illustrate the depth of,
II. His condescension—

[“He humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven:” yes, if he deign to cast an eye upon the highest angels and archangels, it is an act of infinite condescension:

^a Job xi. 7—9. ^b Job xxxvii. 23. ^c Isai. xl. 12, 15, 17, 18.

^d Ps. civ. 1—4.

^e Ps. cxlv. 3.

for, intelligent as they are in comparison of us, “he chargeth them with folly;” and pure as heaven itself is in comparison of earth, it is “not clean in his sight^f.” But he will stoop even to look down on earth, yea and on the meanest and vilest of its inhabitants, provided they do but humble themselves before him. The poor and needy, even in their lowest state, ever have been, and ever shall be, objects of his peculiar regard. Men may be low in *station*, in *character*, and in *spirit*; but he will notice them notwithstanding. The description given us of Lazarus, represents a condition more deplorable than usually falls to the lot of man — — — yet was he set forth as an object of the tenderest compassion to Almighty God. The dying thief may well be adduced as amongst the most degraded of the human race — — — yet did the Saviour honour him with an express and audible assurance, that he should that very day be with him in Paradise. “To the man that is poor and of a contrite spirit” God has promised in a more especial manner to “look, in order to revive and comfort his drooping spirit.” Only let a person lie in the dust before God, and sit, like Job, upon the dunghill, from a consciousness of his own extreme unworthiness, and God will fly instantly to his relief: “he will raise the poor out of the dust, and lift up the needy out of the dunghill:” nor is there any dignity, however high, to which he will not exalt him: “he will set him among the princes, even with the princes of his people:” yes, he will cause him to “sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven,” and to reign with them in glory for ever and ever.

Perhaps the primary import of our text may be found in the elevation of such men as Saul and David from the lowest offices to the throne of Israel: but in the psalm, as well as in the Song of Hannah, from whence it is taken^g, we must undoubtedly look for a higher meaning, even the elevation of an immortal soul from the lowest state of sin and misery to all the glory and felicity of heaven. Would we have a just conception of the change which by the tender mercy of our God shall be wrought on the poor and contrite, we may behold our blessed Lord raised from the grave, to which with unparalleled ignominy he had been committed, and exalted to the right hand of God, above all the principalities and powers both of earth and heaven. Thus will the poor and contrite soul be raised from guilt to peace, from sin to holiness, from the very gates of hell even to the throne of God.]

Does our God so condescend to you? then let me

CALL ON YOU,

1. To adore him—

^f Job iv. 18. and xv. 15.

^g 1 Sam. ii. 8.

[Frequently does this expression occur in the Holy Scriptures, “O Lord, who is like unto thee?” And continually should the thought be in our minds. It is impossible to know any thing of the condescension and grace of God, and not be lost in wonder and in praise. We say not that livelier emotions of joy are wrong; but they are always to be suspected, if they be not blended with a considerable measure of self-loathing and self-abhorrence. Profound adoration seems to be the proper posture of a redeemed soul. O ye poor, whose *station* is so low that the greater part of your fellow-creatures would scarcely deign to notice you, think what love God has shewn towards you, if he has made you rich in faith and heirs of his kingdom^b — — — And ye whose *character* has been so degraded as to have almost resembled that of the Corinthians, think what reason you have to adore your God, if it can be said of you, as of them, “But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our Godⁱ.” Above all, ye drooping and desponding souls, who once were ready to say, “There is no hope,” what thanks can ye give for those rich assurances and consolations which now form a very foretaste of heaven in your souls? And in all these changes, consider chiefly the means which have been used to effect them. It is not by a mere act of mercy that God has wrought these things for you, but by taking on himself your miseries, that ye may be partakers of his glory. To view the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ aright, you must bear in mind, that “though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich^k.” Yes: “He was made sin for you, that you might be made the righteousness of God in him^l.” O bless him, praise him, magnify him, and adore him, and let all that is within you bless his holy name.]

2. To trust in him—

[The greatest discouragements of the saints arise from a view of their own unworthiness. But God, if I may so speak, loves to see you in the dust and on the dunghill. The lower you are abased before him, the more he delights to exalt you. He even derives to himself a glory from the very depths to which he condescends for you. Add not then to all your other sins, that most hateful one of limiting his mercy. If your “sins have ever so much abounded, his grace will much more abound,” if only ye seek it in Christ Jesus, your Mediator and Redeemer. If you attempt to measure God’s love and mercy by any created standard, you must of necessity dishonour him exceedingly: for there is nothing finite that will admit of a comparison with him who is infinite. As for his mercy, he most of all is grieved to

^b Jam. ii. 5.

ⁱ 1 Cor. vi. 9—11.

^k 2 Cor. viii. 9.

^l 2 Cor. v. 21.

have that disparaged, because it is the attribute in which he chiefly delights. Whatever then be your sins, or sorrows, or wants, or fears, cast them all on him, and know that you shall never be disappointed: for “as his majesty is, so also is his mercy.”]

3. To glorify him—

[We have no fear, but that if once you are led to trust in him aright, your most anxious inquiry will be, “What shall I render unto the Lord for all the benefits he hath done unto me?” Methinks you will of yourselves be panting after opportunities to testify to him your love and gratitude^m. You will see, that to surrender up yourselves wholly to him is your “reasonable serviceⁿ.” Knowing that “you are not your own, but are bought with a price, you will long to glorify God with your body and your spirit, which are his^o.” We call you then to this blessed duty, to “live no more unto yourselves, but unto Him who died for you and rose again.” He has made you most blessed among men; for “who is like unto thee, O Israel, O people saved by the Lord^p?” O let it be seen then, that he has made you also the most holy of all the people upon earth. He has set you among the princes now, that you may have fellowship with all the holy Prophets and Apostles of old: and by walking in their steps, you will soon arrive at those blissful mansions, where you shall share with them in their inheritance, and be yourselves “kings and priests unto God and our Father for ever and ever.”]

^m Jer. x. 6, 7.

ⁿ Rom. xii. 1.

^o 1 Cor. vi. 20.

^p Deut. xxxiii. 29.

DCLXXXVIII.

TRUST IN GOD RECOMMENDED.

Ps. cxv. 9—13. *O Israel, trust thou in the Lord: he is their help and their shield. O house of Aaron, trust in the Lord: he is their help and their shield. Ye that fear the Lord, trust in the Lord: he is their help and their shield. The Lord hath been mindful of us: he will bless us: he will bless the house of Israel; he will bless the house of Aaron. He will bless them that fear the Lord, both small and great.*

GREAT as is the stupidity of fallen man, one would not have imagined that it should ever enter into his mind to worship the works of his own hands. To come before those which cannot see; and address ourselves to those that cannot answer; and offer sacrifices to those who can smell no sweet savour from

them; and to rely on those which have no operative or locomotive powers; all this seems to be a degree of infatuation beyond what one would conceive a creature possessed of reason should labour under. But so it is. There are millions of such persons, who are, in fact, as senseless as the objects they worship. But there is one who is able either to save or to destroy, even Jehovah, “who dwelleth in the heavens, and doth whatsoever pleaseth him^a.” And to him I will now call your most devout attention, in the words of my text: “O Israel,” &c. &c.

In these words we behold,

I. Our duty—

This is specified again and again: “Trust in the Lord.” Now this is,

1. A comprehensive duty—

[Our necessities are numberless: our trust in Him, therefore, for the supply of them must extend to our every want, temporal, spiritual, eternal.

We must trust in *his word*; which, as it is in reality the only proper ground of confidence, must also be the *measure* of it. We have no authority to trust in God for any thing which he has *not* promised: and we are bound to trust in him for every thing that he *has* promised. To do the former is presumption: to decline the latter is unbelief.

We must trust, also, in *his Providence*: for every thing is ordered by him, even to “the falling of a sparrow upon the ground:” and we are incapable of ordering any thing for ourselves; “it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps^b.”

We must trust also in *his grace*: for “we cannot do any good thing without him^c.” It is from him that we must obtain “power either to do, or even to will,” what is acceptable in his sight^d: and in every stage of our existence must we depend on him for “more grace^e,” and receive from him “the grace that shall be sufficient for us^f.”

Thus must we look up to him as the source of all good^g, whether for the body or the soul, for time or for eternity.]

2. An universal duty—

[Every person, in every condition, is equally dependent on God, and must equally look to him for a supply of his necessities.

“O Israel, trust thou in the Lord!” Though thou hast been admitted into covenant with God, and art numbered by

^a ver. 3—8.

^b Jer. x. 23.

^c John xv. 5.

^d Phil. ii. 13.

^e Jam. iv. 6.

^f 2 Cor. xii. 9.

^g Jam. i. 17.

him amongst his peculiar people, thou hast not on that account any more sufficiency in thyself than others. Thou art still, and wilt be to thy dying hour, as helpless as a little child, and must be borne by him as an infant in its mother's arms.

“O House of Aaron, trust thou in the Lord!” Thou, who art exercising the office of the priesthood, hast peculiar need of help from above, in order to discharge it to the satisfaction of thy God. Thy difficulties are great; thy duties arduous: and thou hast no more strength in thyself than other men. Even the Apostle Paul exclaimed, “Who is sufficient for these things^h?” Thou hast to give an account of the souls of others, as well as of thine own: and methinks, a double portion of help from above is necessary for thee, in order that thou mayest prevail at last to “save thyself and them that hear thee.”

“Ye also that fear the Lord, trust in the Lord!” As there were proselytes amongst the Jews who were not considered on the high footing of native Israelites, so are there many at this time who are not publicly known and recognised as God's peculiar people, who yet do truly “fear him:” and shall these be overlooked? No: ye are privileged to trust in the Lord, as much as others; and may expect from him all needful blessings, as much as others: for “God is no respecter of persons; but, in every nation, he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness shall be accepted of himⁱ.”]

Such being the duty enjoined on all, let us consider,

II. Our encouragement to perform it—

This is twofold, arising,

1. From what God has already done for us—

[“He has been mindful of us,” of all of us, without exception. To whom of those who ever trusted in him, has he not been both “a help and a shield?” Whom has he not protected from innumerable dangers, and assisted in times of difficulty? — — — Can any one doubt but that he would have long since perished from the assaults of sin and Satan, if God had not been with him, to preserve and uphold him? — — —

But it is not *in time only* that God has been mindful of us: *from all eternity* has his eye been fixed upon us, and his infinite wisdom been occupied in our behalf. Long before we were in existence, or the foundations of the earth were laid, did he make provision for our happiness. He foresaw that we should fall: and he entered into covenant with his own Son to redeem us. He engaged also his Holy Spirit, to execute within us all the purposes of his love — — —

^h 2 Cor. ii. 16.

ⁱ Acts x. 34, 35.

Say, Is not this a sufficient ground for trusting in him? What greater encouragement can we have? — — —]

2. From what he is engaged to do for us—

[“He will bless us.” We need not fear it: for it is a work in which he greatly delights.

“He will bless the House of Israel.” They are “his peculiar people,” “his household,” “his sons and daughters^k.” Will he forget *them*? “They are graven upon the palms of his hands:” and sooner may “a mother forget her sucking child, than he forget” to minister to them whatsoever they may stand in need of^l. His word is pledged to them: and “sooner shall heaven and earth pass away, than one jot or tittle of his word shall fail^m.”

“He will bless the House of Aaron” too, and give to them such communications of grace and peace as the world have no conception of, “clothing them with salvation, and making them to shout aloud for joyⁿ.” The priest, when offering incense, may give us some idea of what the Lord imparts to his faithful servants, whilst occupied in his service. His incense no other person was privileged to smell unto, nor he himself on any other occasion than that: but then, whilst honouring God with it, he was richly regaled with its odours. Such is the privilege of all God’s faithful servants, in the midst of their laborious duties. Their face often shines with radiance from God upon the holy mount; though, by reason of the veil they wear, it is not discerned in their intercourse with the world.

“He will indeed bless all who fear the Lord, both small and great.” They may be overlooked by men; but they are known to God; and his eye is over them for good. It matters not whether they be great or small. The great are not so great, but that they need his blessing: nor are the small so insignificant, that they shall be deemed unworthy of his notice. If they be as beggars on a dunghill, even there will he visit them; and from thence will he take them, “to set them among the princes, and to make them inherit a throne of glory^o.”

To all of them, without exception, will he give occasion for that devout acknowledgment, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ!”]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are ignorant of God—

[This is the state of all who are not living in the habitual performance of the duty here enjoined: for, “if they knew God’s name, they would put their trust in him^p.” Let me then ask of

^k 2 Cor. vi. 18.

^l Isai. xlix. 15, 16.

^m Isai. liv. 9, 10.

ⁿ Ps. cxxxii. 16.

^o 1 Sam. ii. 8.

^p Ps. ix. 10.

you, Who will be *your* help, and *your* shield? Who in this world? and Who, when you shall be standing at the judgment-seat of Christ, and the sword of vengeance is lifted up for your destruction? — — — O seek to know God, especially as he is revealed to us in Christ Jesus! — — — And tremble now for fear of his judgments; and flee for refuge to the hope that is set before you. So shall you even yet escape his wrath, and receive at his hands all the blessings of salvation.]

2. Those who are putting their trust in him—

[Whom amongst you all has he ever disappointed of his hope? Are you not all witnesses for him, that he is faithful to his word, and that “of all the good things that he has promised you, not so much as one has ever failed^a?” He has been ever “mindful of you, and blessed you:” be ye, then, “mindful” of him, and “bless” him. Bear in remembrance your obligations to him: and go to him “in every time of need, both for mercy to pardon, and for grace to help^r.” And bless him from your inmost souls, as David, *specifying your respective characters*, exhorts you: “Let Israel now say, that his mercy endureth for ever. Let the house of Aaron now say, that his mercy endureth for ever. Let them now, that fear the Lord, say, that his mercy endureth for ever^s.” Let this song be begun by you on earth, and you shall sing it to all eternity in heaven.]

^a Josh. xxiii. 14.

^r Heb. iv. 16.

^s Ps. cxviii. 2—4.

DCLXXXIX.

THANKSGIVING FOR DELIVERANCE.

Ps. cxvi. 1—7. *I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications. Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live. The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the Lord; O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul. Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; yea, our God is merciful! The Lord preserveth the simple: I was brought low, and he helped me. Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.*

THE abruptness of this psalm shews, that it was the fruit of much previous meditation: the writer of it had been “musing in his heart, till at last the fire kindled, and he spake with his tongue.” It begins, “I love:” and, though our translators had not supplied the deficiency, there would have remained no doubt on the mind of the reader, who it was that

was the object of the Psalmist's regard. The fact is, that nothing so endears the Deity to the souls of men as answers to prayer; nor does any thing so encourage sinners to address him with unwearied importunity. The two first verses of the psalm are a kind of summary of the whole; setting forth in few words what he afterwards expatiates upon more at length: but though we shall, on this account, pass them over in our discussion, we shall not be unmindful of the resolution contained in them, but shall conclude our subject with commending it to your most serious attention.

The points which now call for our notice are,

I. The troubles he had endured—

[We know not for certain what these were; but we are sure, that the psalm was written after the ark had been brought up to Mount Zion, and the worship of God had been permanently settled at Jerusalem^a: and therefore we apprehend, that it was written on occasion of David's deliverance from some overwhelming distress both of body and mind, resembling that specified in the sixth psalm^b. The terms used in our text might indeed be interpreted of death only; because the word "hell" often means nothing more than the grave: but we rather think that terrors of conscience, on account of his sin committed in the matter of Uriah, had given a ten-fold poignancy to the fear of death, and that his experience was similar to that described in the 25th Psalm, where he says, "The troubles of my heart are enlarged; O bring thou me out of my distresses! Look upon mine affliction and my pain; and *forgive all my sins*!"^c]

But whatever was the precise occasion of David's sorrows, it is manifest, that, sooner or later, we must all be brought into a situation wherein his language will be exactly suitable to us. "The sorrows of death" will shortly "encompass us," and "the pains of hell," if we have not previously obtained a sense of reconciliation with God, will "get hold upon us;" and, in the contemplation of an approaching eternity, "we shall find trouble and sorrow," such as in our present state of carelessness and security we have no conception of. O that we could but bring our hearers to realize that awful hour, when we shall look back upon our mis-spent hours with unavailing regret, and look forward to our great account with fear and trembling, wishing, if it were possible, that we might have a fresh term of probation allowed us, or that the hills and mountains might cover us from

^a ver. 18, 19.

^b Ps. vi. 2, 3.

^c Ps. xxv. 17, 18.

the face of our offended God! Let all, even though, like David, they be monarchs upon their thrones, know, that the time must shortly arrive, when the things of time and sense will appear in all their real insignificance; and nothing will be deemed of any importance but the eternal welfare of the soul.]

Whatever his troubles had been, we have no doubt respecting,

II. The means he had used for his relief from them—

David had had recourse to prayer; “Then called I on the name of the Lord; O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul!”

This is the proper remedy for all our troubles—

[“Is any afflicted? let him pray;” says an inspired apostle. And God himself says, “Call upon me in the time of trouble; and I will hear thee; and thou shalt glorify me.” Indeed, where else can we go with any hope of relief? If it be the death of the body that we dread, man can do nothing for us, any farther than it shall please God to employ him as an instrument for our good. If it be the death of the soul which we fear, who but God can help us? Who can interpose between a sinner and his Judge? If we betake ourselves to a throne of grace, and “pray unto our God with strong crying and tears,” we shall find that He “is able to save us from death:” but created powers are physicians of no value — — —]

We must however, in our prayers, resemble David—

[Behold what humility and fervour were manifested in this petition; “O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul!” Prayer does not consist in fluent or eloquent expressions, but in ardent desires of the soul: and it may as well be uttered in sighs and groans, as in the most energetic words that language can afford. “God knoweth the mind of the Spirit,” by whose inspiration all acceptable supplications are suggested. Never was there a petition more pleasing to God than that of the publican, “God be merciful to me a sinner!” nor did any prove more effectual for immediate relief than that recorded in our text. Truly this is a comfortable consideration to the broken-hearted penitent: the greatness of his sorrows perhaps prevents the enlargement of his heart in prayer: but God estimates his prayers, not by their fluency, but by their sincerity; and that which is offered in indistinct and unutterable groans, is as intelligible and as acceptable to him, as if every request were offered in the most measured terms. Prayer thus offered, shall never go forth in vain.]

This appears from,

III. The success of those means—

Most encouraging is the testimony which the Psalmist bears to the condescension and goodness of God—

[Not a word intervenes between his petition for mercy and his acknowledgment of mercy received: “Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; yea, our God is merciful.” Here the Psalmist marks the union of justice and mercy in the dispensations of God’s grace towards him: and that union is invariable, whenever we plead before him that great sacrifice which was made for the sins of the whole world, and which has fully satisfied the justice of our God. Moreover, he represents this mercy as the common lot of all, who in simplicity and godly sincerity implore it at God’s hands; “The Lord preserveth the simple,” and will never suffer one of them to perish. But then he brings it back again to his own experience, and acknowledges with heartfelt gratitude that God had received his prayer, and made him a most distinguished monument of his mercy.]

Such is the testimony which every contrite and believing suppliant shall be able to bear—

[Yes; justice is on the Believer’s side, as well as mercy. Whoever comes to God in the name of Christ, may plead, that all his debts have been discharged by his great Surety, and that all the glory of heaven has been purchased for him by his Redeemer’s blood. Through this infinitely meritorious atonement God is reconciled to man, and “the righteousness of Jehovah, no less than his mercy, is declared in the remission of sins^d,” so that, “if we humbly confess our sins, God will be faithful and just in forgiving our sins, and in cleansing us from all unrighteousness^e.” Let “the simple”-hearted penitent rejoice in this assurance; and let every one labour from his own experience to say, “I was brought low, and he helped *me*.”]

In the close of our text we see,

IV. The improvement which he made of his whole experience—

He determined henceforth to make God “the rest” of his soul—

[Truly there is no rest for the soul in any other. We may renew our attempts to seek it in this lower world, but we shall find none, except in the ark of God. Indeed the great use of troubles is to bring us to a conviction of this truth: and, whatever we may have suffered from “the sorrows of death,” or “the pains of hell,” we may bless and adore our God for the dispensation, if it dispose us at last to seek all our happiness in him — —]

^d Rom. iii. 25, 26.

^e 1 John i. 9.

To the same "Rest" must we also continually "return"—

[As the needle of a compass which has sustained some violent concussion will continue its tremulous motion till it returns to the pole again, so must our souls do, if at any time through the violence of temptation they be diverted for a season from their God. Not a moment's rest should we even wish to have, till we find it in him alone. In all his perfections we have "chambers into which we may enter," and in which we may enjoy security from every impending danger. His omniscience will prevent surprise: his omnipotence will defeat our most potent adversaries: his love will comfort us under our most painful circumstances; and his faithfulness will preserve us even to the end. Let our troubles then drive us to him, and our experience of past mercies determine us to "cleave unto him with full purpose of heart."]

ADDRESS—

[We now revert to the resolution announced by the Psalmist at the very beginning of the psalm: "Because the Lord hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live." This shews how justly he appreciated the Divine goodness; that he regarded it as an inexhaustible fountain, from whence the whole creation may incessantly "draw water with joy." The very command which God himself has given us, attests the same, and proves, that it is no less our privilege than our duty to "pray without ceasing," to "pray, and not faint." O Brethren, let every answer to prayer bring you back again more speedily to the throne of grace; and every communication of blessings to your souls make you more importunate for further blessings, till "your cup runneth over," and you are "filled with all the fulness of God."]

DCXC.

GRATEFUL RECOLLECTIONS.

Ps. cxvi. 8, 9. *Thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling: I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living.*

IT is justly said by David, in another psalm, "The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein^a:" and great indeed they will appear, to all who endeavour to trace them even in the narrow sphere of their own experience. David, it is true, had a greater variety

^a Ps. cxi. 2.

of extraordinary incidents to enumerate, and of mercies to be thankful for, than almost any other person whatever; but still there is no such difference between his experience and that of other men, but that his complaints may be poured out by them, and his thanksgivings be adopted by them. In the psalm before us he seems to have been delivered from some heavy afflictions; and to have been raised from the depths of sorrow to an extraordinary elevation of peace and joy. He had been encompassed with the sorrows of death, and the pains of hell had got hold upon him; but God, in answer to his prayers, had graciously delivered him from all his troubles.

In the words which we have just read, we see,

I. His review of past mercies—

God, it seems, had delivered,

1. His “soul from death”—

[In its primary sense, we apprehend, these words refer to the death of the body. Saul had sought to the utmost of his power to destroy him: but God had on many occasions signally interposed for his protection, and had preserved him to the present hour. And have not we also reason to adore our God for the interpositions of his providence in our behalf? Though we have not been in similar circumstances with David, we have been exposed to many dangers, both seen and unseen; and have therefore just occasion to adopt before God the same expressions of reverential gratitude.

But we must doubtless include under these terms a deliverance from eternal death also^b.” David was assured that God had “forgiven all his sins^c,” not excepting those committed in the matter of Uriah^d: well therefore might he magnify the grace which had been exercised towards him. And have not we also reason to magnify our God for having rescued our souls from perdition? True; many of us, it is to be feared, are yet in an unpardoned state: nevertheless, even they have cause to bless God that they have not long since been consigned over to everlasting and irremediable misery. Millions of the human race have been cut off in their sins, though they had not, it may be, attained one half of the measure of iniquity that lies upon our souls: and yet they have been taken, and we left. O let us admire and adore this inscrutable mystery, and let us give unto God the glory due unto his name!

^b Compare Ps. lxxxvi. 13. and Isai. xxxviii. 17.

^c Ps. ciii. 3.

^d 2 Sam. xii. 13.

But it may be that our souls are in a pardoned state; and that God has “taken a live coal from off the altar, and applied it to our lips, saying, Thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin is purged^e.” If so, what acknowledgments should we make? Verily there can be no circumstances whatever in which such persons should not bless God from their very inmost souls^f.]

2. His eyes from tears—

[David often found occasion to weep, either on his own account or on account of others^g. Indeed his whole life was tempestuous and full of trouble. What the particular affliction was from which he had now been delivered, we do not exactly know. If it was sickness and death, his tears must have proceeded, as Hezekiah’s did, from an apprehension of the distraction and misery that were likely to ensue to the whole state by his removal from it at that time^h. But whatever it was, his mind was now at ease in relation to it.

And are *we* at this time free from any great affliction? Surely we have reason to be thankful for it: for, how numberless are the sources of grief from whence our whole souls may speedily be overwhelmed! In our own persons we are exposed to diseases and accidents every moment. In our relative connexions too, how many occasions of sorrow are ever ready to arise! the misconduct of one, the unkindness of another, the misfortunes of a third, the death of one that was to us as our own souls,—alas! alas! it is a vale of tears that we are passing through, moaning or bemoaned every hour. Our very pleasures not unfrequently become occasions of the bitterest pains. If then we have been kept for any time in a good measure of peaceful serenity, we may well account it a rich blessing, for which we are bound to adore and magnify our God. It is not from the dust that either our trials or our comforts spring: and, if God have dealt to us an abundance of earthly comfort, whilst so many thousands of our fellow-creatures are racked with pain, or bowed down with sorrows, we ought to acknowledge him as the author and giver of these distinguished privileges.]

3. His feet from falling—

[On more than one occasion, David’s “feet had well nigh slipped.” When urged to kill Saul, and when hastening to avenge himself on Nabal, he was on the brink of a dangerous precipice, from whence however it pleased God to deliver him.

^e Isai. vi. 6, 7.

^f 1 Pet. i. 3, 4. N. B. This is the very commencement of an Epistle written to “Strangers who were scattered all the world over by cruel persecutions.”

^g Ps. xlii. 3. 2 Sam. xiii. 36. and xv. 30. and xviii. 33.

^h Isai. xxxviii. 9—14.

And what a miracle of mercy is it, if *our* feet are kept! Consider with what innumerable snares and temptations we are beset on every side, and what corruptions reign in our own hearts, ready to precipitate us into any evil: consider the deceitfulness of sin too, what pleasing and even innocent forms it will assume: consider also the malice and subtlety of our great adversary, who is going about continually as a roaring lion seeking to devour us: consider more particularly how many persons of eminence in the religious world have fallen; a David, a Solomon, a Peter; O have not we reason to adore our God, if our feet have been kept from falling; more especially when we reflect, how near we have been to many grievous falls, when nothing but God's infinite mercy has held us up!

Let us look back then on these mercies vouchsafed unto us, and, from the review, let us follow David in,]

II. His determination arising from it—

By “the land of the living” we understand this present worldⁱ, where alone there is any opportunity of making suitable returns to God. “The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day,” says Hezekiah^k. As long as he should live, David determined, with God's help, to walk before God,

1. In a constant attendance on his ordinances—

[This is particularly intended in the words of our text: *twice* is the idea expressly stated in the following verses^l. And where should a person go to make his acknowledgments to God, but to His house, where the free-will offerings and thank-offerings of old were wont to be brought? A grateful heart will pant after these public opportunities of glorifying God, even “as the hart panteth after the water-brooks^m,” and to be deprived of access to them will be a source of pain and griefⁿ. David envied the very swallows their liberty of access to the house of God, when he was kept at a distance from it^o. Let us shew our gratitude in the same way. And let not our attendance on his courts, after a recovery from sickness, be a mere prelude to our return to all the gaieties and follies of the world; but let our delight be in the worship of our God on earth, as an earnest and foretaste of our enjoyment of him in a better world.]

2. Under an abiding sense of his presence—

[To “set the Lord always before us” is the sure way to honour him. Whether we think of him or not, “he is always about our bed and about our paths, and spieth out all our

ⁱ Ps. xxvii. 13. Isai. liii. 8.

^l ver. 12, 14, 17, 18, 19.

ⁿ Ps. xlii. 3, 4.

^k Isai. xxxviii. 19.

^m Ps. xlii. 1, 2.

^o Ps. lxxxiv. 1—4.

ways." Wherever we are, therefore, there should be that inscription, which Hagar saw, "Thou God seest me." O how circumspect would our conduct then be! How continually would that question recur to our minds, "What will my God approve?" That this is the frame of mind which every child of God will cultivate, is beautifully represented by St. Paul in his address to servants: he tells them how the servant of God *does* act towards his heavenly Master, and proposes it as a pattern for them towards their earthly masters^p— — — Let us "not be mere eye-servants, as men-pleasers," but exert ourselves at all times to please our God, as servants do under the immediate eye of their master.]

3. In a cheerful obedience to his commands—

[*This* is to walk before God in deed and in truth^q: and to produce this, is the very end of all God's mercies towards us. Surely, if we are in any measure sensible of our obligations to God, we shall not account any of "his commandments grievous." We shall not wish so much as one of them to be relaxed, but shall attend to all of them without partiality and without hypocrisy. Happy would it be for us if more of this gratitude were found amongst us. Happy would it be if the love which God has shewn to us in Christ Jesus constrained us to live altogether unto God; so that we could make the same appeal to him that Hezekiah did, "Remember now, O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have *walked before thee in truth*, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight^r." This is the surest test of our integrity, and the most acceptable expression of our gratitude to God.]

In our REFLECTIONS on this subject, we cannot but view in it abundant matter,

1. For our humiliation—

[How many mercies have we received, yet never stood amazed at the goodness of our God! Were it only *this*, that our souls are not consigned over to everlasting death, we should have cause to bless our God day and night. Only reflect a moment, how dreadful it would have been to be cut off in our sins, and to be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where there is nothing but weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth! And yet who amongst us has not richly deserved it? who has not been in constant danger of it from day to day? Our sins have been more in number than the hairs of our head; yet not a thousandth part so great as they would have been, if we had been left to carry into act all the evil dispositions of our hearts. Truly if we have not run into the same enormities as others, it is God, and God alone, who has made the difference

^p Eph. vi. 5—8.

^q 1 Kings ii. 3, 4.

^r Isai. xxxviii. 3.

between us. What shall we say then to the insensibility which we have manifested under all these stupendous mercies? Are we not ashamed? Have we not reason to be ashamed, yea, and to abase ourselves before God in dust and ashes? O let us remember that ingratitude is a sin of the most crimson dye^s: and that, if we will not notice as we ought the operations of God's hands, his loving-kindness will ere long be shut up in everlasting displeasure^t.]

2. For our encouragement—

[To the evil and to the unthankful have all these mercies been vouchsafed: What then shall not be done for us, if we will seek after God in sincerity and truth? Surely these present blessings shall be only as the drop before the shower; they shall be a prelude to that blessedness, "where there shall be no more death nor sorrow, nor sin, but where all tears shall be wiped away from our eyes for ever^u." God offers himself to every one of us, as a Covenant God: he says to each of us, as he did to Abraham of old, "I am God Almighty: walk before me, and be thou perfect^x." In Christ Jesus he is already reconciled to us; and he only requires that we come to him through Christ, embracing his proffered mercies, and yielding up ourselves to him as those that are alive from the dead. O that he may so draw us, that we may run after him; and so subdue us to the obedience of faith, that we may become a peculiar people, zealous of good works!

^s Rom. i. 21. ^t Ps. xxviii. 5. ^u Rev. xxi. 4. ^x Gen. xvii. 1.

DCXCI.

HOW TO REQUITE THE LORD FOR HIS MERCIES.

Ps. cxvi. 12—14. *What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me! I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all his people.*

THE influence of faith on our eternal salvation is obvious to all who have any just views of the Gospel: but its operation on the mind in this present life, and its efficacy to produce peace and holiness, are by no means generally understood. In this view however the psalm before us is peculiarly instructive. David, when his faith failed him, overlooked all the mercies that he had received at the Lord's hands, and rashly concluded, that all which had been declared to him respecting the purpose of God to establish him on the

throne of Israel, was false: "I said in my haste, all men are liars." But, when his faith was strengthened, he no longer gave way to such querulous expressions and desponding fears: on the contrary, he then was full of peace and joy; and with the liveliest emotions of love and gratitude, exclaimed, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me?" That we may be brought to this happy state of mind, and may be led to abound in praise and thanksgiving, let us contemplate,

I. The benefits which our God has conferred upon us—

On such an inexhaustible subject as this, we can do no more than suggest a few leading thoughts, which may be more largely prosecuted in our secret retirement. To contemplate them in all their fulness will be the blissful employment of eternity. Let us notice those,

1. Of creation—

[How distinguished is our condition above all other creatures upon the face of the earth! In bodily powers, it is true, we are exceeded by many; who have not only far greater strength and agility than we, but their senses also, of sight, and hearing, and taste, and smelling, and of feeling also, far more exquisite than ours. But the endowment of reason elevates us far above them all, and puts them all, in some degree at least, in subjection under our feet. In them indeed is instinct, and that too in such perfection as almost to border on the province of reason; but in us is a capacity to comprehend things of spiritual and eternal import, and an ability to know, to love, to enjoy, to glorify our God. Say whether these be not mercies which call for the devoutest gratitude at our hands?

Nor is it a small matter that we have been brought into the world at such a *time*, when the light of God's truth is so clearly seen, and in such a *place* as Britain, where it shines forth, as it were, in meridian splendour. We might have been born of Mahometan or Heathen parents; or even in our own country have been so situated, as to hear but little of Christ and his salvation. Surely we should not overlook these great benefits, nor forget what a mercy it is to live in this present day, when there exists such an ardent zeal for the propagation of the Gospel, and such unprecedented efforts are made for its diffusion throughout the world.]

2. Of Providence—

[Innumerable are the deliverances which we have all received from dangers seen and unseen. Millions have been

taken out of the world before they had attained our age; and it is to God's gracious care alone we owe it, that we have yet "space given us for repentance," and time afforded us for securing the things belonging to our peace. And how different might be our condition from what it is! We might be so destitute of every comfort, and so oppressed with pain and anguish, that our very existence, instead of being a blessing, might be a burthen and a curse. We all, it is true, have trials of some kind or other; but we all have our consolations also; and those who have most afflictions, have in themselves an evidence, how greatly we are all indebted to our God for that measure of consolation which is given to mitigate our sorrows, and how infinitely short of our deserts is any trouble which is allotted us in this world.]

3. Of Redemption—

[But how shall we speak of this? Who can "comprehend the height and depth of God's love" displayed in it? That God should so pity us as to give his only-begotten Son to die for us! that he should lay our iniquities on him, as our Surety, and thus make a way for the display of all his own glorious perfections in the salvation of man! What shall we say to this? It is "a love that passeth knowledge." Every part of it is described as far exceeding all finite comprehension. The "riches" of grace contained in it, are "unsearchable:" the "peace" flowing from it, "passeth understanding:" the "joy" imparted by it, is "unspeakable and full of glory." The whole mystery of redemption, as contrived, as executed, as applied, and as experienced in the souls of men, is so great, that we cannot contemplate it a moment, without exclaiming, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"]

Having thus briefly touched upon the mercies of our God, let us proceed to mark,

II. The sense we should have of them—

It is not any slight acknowledgment that becomes us: we should contemplate them,

1. With overwhelming gratitude—

[This is implied in the Psalmist's expression, "What shall I render unto the Lord?" It is not a calm inquiry, but the language of a heart oppressed, as it were, with a load of obligation. A man who can speak calmly on such a subject, nay, I had almost said, a man who can speak at all upon it, feels it

^a Rom. xi. 33.

not as he ought; it is too big for utterance: as, in a mind overwhelmed with conscious unworthiness, "the Spirit of God maketh intercession with groans which cannot be uttered," so methinks, if we had a just apprehension of the benefits conferred upon us, our sense of them would be expressed rather in a way of silent adoration, than of verbal acknowledgment. We do not mean by this, that men should not sing praises to their God, and tell of all his wondrous works; for it is our bounden duty to celebrate them to the utmost of our power^b: — — — but, in our present state of darkness and ignorance, it is rarely given to men so fully to behold all the wonders of God's love, as to have their organs of vision blinded by the overwhelming splendour of the light: we "see at present only in part:" we "behold things only, as in a mirror, darkly:" as "Moses put a veil upon his face" to hide from the admiring Israelites that glory which they were "unable steadfastly to behold," so God has, in mercy, veiled even his goodness from us, because we are incapable of supporting the ineffable effulgence of his glory. Of what we do see, we must say, with Job, "Lo, these are parts of his ways; but how little a portion is heard of him! but the thunder of his power" (we may add too, the riches of his goodness) "who can understand?"^c]

2. With practical self-devotion—

[However overwhelmed our minds may be, there must be in us a determination of heart to render to the Lord all the service of which he has made us capable. Our gratitude to him must be, "not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth." His love must have a constraining influence on our souls: it must "constrain us no longer to live unto ourselves, but unto Him who died for us, and rose again^d." Every blessing we enjoy must lead us to Him, who of his great mercy and bounty has bestowed it on us: and the consideration of redeeming love especially must animate us to a total surrender of ourselves, in body, soul, and spirit, to the service of our God^e. As, under the Law, the slaughtered victims were wholly burnt by fire upon the altar, so, under the Gospel, must we offer ourselves up wholly to the Lord "as living sacrifices." This is nothing more than our reasonable service^f: "We are not our own; we are bought with a price: and therefore we should glorify God in our body and in our spirit, which are his^g."]

But let us somewhat more distinctly consider,

III. The way in which we should requite them—

The example of the pious Jews is very instructive—

^b Isai. xii. 14—16.

^c Job xxvi. 14.

^d 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

^e 1 Thess. v. 23.

^f Rom. xii. 1.

^g 1 Cor. vi. 20.

[The Jews were encouraged under their troubles to betake themselves to God, and to make vows unto the Most High: and these vows they were required strictly to perform. On paying their vows to their heavenly Benefactor, they presented certain sacrifices, of which they and their families were permitted to partake, in remembrance of God's mercies towards them, and as an expression of their gratitude to him^h. On these occasions, it was common for the master of the family to close the feast by taking a cup of wine, and drinking of it, first himself, and afterwards all his family in succession; and then to close the whole with a hymn. To this custom it should seem that David refers in other psalmsⁱ, as well as in the passage before us: and our blessed Lord adopted it as a suitable method of commemorating the wonders of his dying love^k. He took a cup, and blessed it, and gave it to his disciples, that they, and all his followers, to the very end of time, might drink it in remembrance of his blood shed for the remission of their sins^l.]

After this example we should pay our vows, and “receive the cup of salvation,” or, as that used by the Jews was called, “the cup of deliverances”—

[Is it asked, What sacrifice are we to offer? I answer, The sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving^m. “The calves of our lips” are far more acceptable to God than all the burnt-offerings that ever were offeredⁿ. And surely the sacramental cup, of which every Believer should frequently partake, may at once remind us of all the mercies we have ever received, and be taken by us as a memorial of God's unbounded love to us, and of our unfeigned surrender of ourselves to him. In these expressions of our love and gratitude we should have all the powers of our souls called forth: “all that is within us should bless the name of our God:” and the entire devotion of ourselves to his service should bear witness to our sincerity before him. Never are we to be restrained by fear or shame: no; we must pay our vows “in the presence of all his people.” If we are ashamed of Christ, what can we expect, but that he will be ashamed of us? But, “if we confess him before men, then will he also confess us in the presence of his Father and his holy angels.” Here then is the service which we are to render unto God in return for all his benefits: we are to confess him, to magnify him, to adore him, to give up ourselves to him as his redeemed people, to live altogether by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, receiving all out of his fulness, and improving all for the honour of his name.

^h Lev. vii. 12. Deut. xii. 6, 7, 17, 18.

ⁱ Ps. lxxvi. 13—16. and cvii. 22.

^l 1 Cor. xi. 25.

ⁿ Ps. l. 13, 14. with Hos. xiv. 2.

^k Matt. xxvi. 27.

^m Heb. xiii. 15.

So entirely should we be the Lord's, that "whether we eat, or drink, or whatever we do, we should do all to his glory^o."

ADDRESS—

1. Those who have never yet instituted this inquiry—

[Alas! how many have never made any other use of God's mercies, but to render them means of self-destruction, and instruments of dishonouring their God! Has he given them abundance? they have employed it in riot and excess. Has he vouchsafed to them health and strength? they have turned these blessings into an occasion of more unbridled licentiousness. Has he bestowed intellectual powers upon them? they have perverted these to justify their evil ways, and to dispute the authority of God. The very Gospel itself they have abused as sanctioning their presumptuous hopes, and as affording reason for dissipating all fear of God's displeasure. Ah, Brethren! what will be the end of these things? "Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people, and unwise?" How will ye answer it at the last day? When your Judge shall put the question, "What could I have done more for my vineyard than I did? what excuse will ye offer for bringing forth only wild grapes?" Do but think of these things, ere it be too late. But if ye will not lay these things to heart, then know assuredly, that, if ye will not render unto the Lord according to his works of mercy, he will render unto you according to your aggravated iniquities.]

2. Those who profess to feel their obligations to their God—

[Examine, I beseech you, the returns which *you* have made: do they not "fill you with shame and confusion of face?" Are ye not perfectly astonished at your own ingratitude? O! see what need there is to walk humbly before God. But yet, do not despond. Your "God is able to make all grace abound towards you:" and, if you call upon him, "he will give you more grace," even grace sufficient for you, so that you shall be able to "render to him, in some measure at least, according to the benefits he has conferred upon you." You see how he wrought in David, and in his holy Apostles: and is his arm shortened, that it cannot reach to you? Arise, and bless your God; walk joyfully before him; "let your hearts be lifted up in his ways:" come, and take the cup of salvation; and, as one great family, hand it round, each, as it were, to the other, that all of you may be encouraged, and all be comforted, and all be strengthened. "Now," even *now*, take the blessed cup into your hands; and drink of it "in the presence of all

^o 1 Cor. x. 31.

^p Isai. v. 1—4.

his people;" yea, drink, and live for ever. And inquire with yourselves, inquire of each other, yea, inquire of God himself, what you can do for him; and let your capacity for his service be the only measure of your exertion.]

DCXCII.

THE DEATH OF SAINTS PRECIOUS.

Ps. cxvi. 15. *Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.*

THE meaning of these words will be best marked from the occasion on which we suppose them to have been uttered. The psalm appears to have been written after Absalom's rebellion. Most imminent were the dangers from which David had been delivered. For this mercy he renders thanks: and acknowledges, to the praise of his heavenly Protector, that, whilst his own son had sought his life, and instigated multitudes to seek his destruction, God had interposed for his deliverance, and had inflicted merited judgments on his enemies. So precious had God accounted his death, that he would make those to pay dearly who had laboured to effect it: or, as it is said in another psalm, "God had redeemed his soul from deceit and violence, and precious had his blood been in his sight^a."

From the words which I have read, I shall take occasion to shew,

I. In what light God regards the death of the saints—

We are not to understand that the death of his saints is pleasing to God, but rather, that he places a high value on them, and that he will suffer none to accomplish their death with impunity. So precious is their death, that,

1. He watches over them to prevent it—

[Incessant is his care over his Church; as he has said, "I the Lord do keep it: I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day^b." He assures us that "no weapon that is formed against his people shall prosper^c." So that, as has been often said, "God's servants are immortal,

^a Ps. lxxii. 14.

^b Isai. xxvii. 4.

^c Isai. liv. 17.

till their work is done." Not that they are at liberty to tempt the Lord by rushing needlessly into danger: but, if called by God to perform any duty, they have nothing to fear. David's deliverances were numberless, as were those also of the Apostle Paul. Our Lord himself, too, was encompassed for years by those who sought his life: but none could prevail against him, till "his hour was come." Weak as his people are, even "as lambs in the midst of wolves," none can effect their ruin, "none can ever pluck them out of his hands." "There is an appointed time" for every one of them; and, as they must wait, so must their enemies also wait, till that time is come.]

2. He will come forth to avenge it—

[God does suffer his people to be assaulted, and to be put to death: but he will call their enemies to a severe account for all that they do against the meanest of his saints. It is said, "He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of his eye^d." We well know the force of this figure, if but a mote get into our eye: and we may therefore understand from thence how God feels when any of his people are assaulted. He has told us, that "it were better for any man that a millstone were hanged round his neck, and that he were cast into the depths of the sea, than that he should offend one of God's little ones." We see, in the history of David, how Ahithophel suffered for his treachery, and Absalom for his rebellion: and sooner or later shall every man who, either in a way of direct assault or of silent contempt, offends the people of the Lord, surely "give account thereof in the day of judgment^e."]]

3. He will never suffer it, till he has accomplished his good work within them—

[To every one of his people has God assigned his proper work: to some, as to the dying thief, little more is given than an opportunity of confessing Christ: to others, as to Paul and John, are long and arduous labours allotted: but the times of all are in God's hands; and he will enable every one of them to say, "Father, I have glorified thee on earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do^f." To his blood-thirsty enemies our Saviour said, "I must walk to-day and to-morrow; and the third day I shall be perfected:" and even to the most potent amongst them we may say, "Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above." Men may think they have accomplished their purposes; as when Peter was kept in prison till the very night preceding his intended execution; or as when Paul had been stoned, and left for dead. But "there is no counsel or might against the Lord." He will make "the wrath of man to praise him; and the

^d Zech. ii. 8.

^e 1 Pet. iv. 4, 5.

^f John xvii. 4.

remainder of it," which would counteract his purposes, "he will restrain."]

Such being God's estimate of his people's death, we may see,

II. In what light we also should regard it—

However we may congratulate souls on their removal to a better world, we cannot but regard their death,

1. As an event to be deplored—

[The world little think how much they are indebted to the saints. It is for their sakes that the world itself is kept in existence. If their number were complete, and their graces arrived at the measure ordained for them, we have reason to think that an end would be put to the present state of things, as we know there will be at the day of judgment. The usefulness of some who are in very conspicuous stations is seen and acknowledged: but it is not easy to conceive how much good may be done by the meanest saint, through the prayers which he offers up from time to time. The prayer of Moses repeatedly saved the whole Jewish nation, when for their iniquities God had determined to sweep them all away. And Abraham prevailed, to the full extent of his petitions, in behalf of Sodom and all the cities of the plain. And who can tell what blessings the prayers of God's people have brought on our guilty land, or what blessings may be obtained through the most humble individual amongst them? As a public loss, therefore, I think the removal of any saint may be deplored. As it respects him personally, we may indeed, from a variety of circumstances, be led to rejoice in it; because he rests from his labours, and may therefore be accounted blessed: but as far as the work of God on earth and the benefit of mankind are concerned, his death may be regarded as a ground of general regret.]

2. As a dispensation to be carefully improved—

[In the death of a saint, God himself calls upon us to inquire, whether we, if we had been taken, should have been found ready. He bids us to "work whilst it is day, since the night is coming when no man can work." He leads us to consider the blessedness of dying in the Lord; and bids us to "be followers of those who, through faith and patience, now inherit the promises"^g— — —]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who make light of death—

^g Here the particular experience of a *departed saint* may be stated as instructive, and his dying advice be specified.

[It is surprising how little effect the death of any saint produces on the minds of survivors; and how speedily any impression wears away. The conversation of mourners assembled to attend a funeral gives us a melancholy picture of the human mind, and of the extreme indifference with which the concerns of eternity are regarded by us. But, Brethren, will death appear so light a matter when we shall have entered into the eternal world? or is there one of us who will not wish that he had laboured far more to prepare for his great account? I pray you, trifle not with your souls; but know assuredly, that one soul is of more value than the whole world.]

2. Those who estimate death according to its real importance—

[You well know the true value of *life*. Its great use is, to prepare for *death*. Let every hour be pressed into the service of your God. Let every thing be valued according to its bearing on eternity. Above all, let the Saviour be dear to you. It is He who has taken away the sting of death, and authorised you to number it amongst your richest treasures. Through his atoning blood you may look forward to death and judgment with far other eyes than they can be viewed by the ungodly world. You may regard death as the commencement of life, and the very gate of heaven. Only take care, therefore, that in your experience it be “Christ to live,” and then you shall assuredly and that it will “be gain to die.”]

DCXCIII.

THE GENTILES CALLED TO PRAISE GOD.

Ps. cxvii. *O praise the Lord, all ye nations: praise him, all ye people. For his merciful kindness is great toward us: and the truth of the Lord endureth for ever. Praise ye the Lord.*

THIS is the shortest of all the Psalms: but it is by no means the least interesting: the energy with which it is expressed abundantly marks the importance of the truths contained in it, and the feelings with which it should be read by us. The same sentiments are doubtless contained in many other psalms: but to a mind that is rightly disposed, they are ever new: they need no embellishment to adorn them, no eloquence to set them forth: if any man can hear or reflect upon them without emotion, the fault is in himself alone. Let us consider the psalm,

I. In a general view—

Here is a call to the whole world to praise and adore their God. Those perfections which they are more especially called to celebrate, are,

1. The greatness of his mercy—

[Reflect on his *sparing* mercy. Consider the state of the whole world, which has so cast off their allegiance to God, that “he is not in all their thoughts” — — — Consider the inconceivable mass of iniquity that has been accumulating now nearly six thousand years — — — and yet we are spared! Once indeed God destroyed the world; but only once. On some few occasions God has marked his indignation against sin; but on very few: an Achan, an Uzzah, an Ananias, have been set up as witnesses for God, that he hateth iniquity: but these only serve the more strikingly to illustrate the astonishing forbearance of our God — — — Let every one of us look back upon his own personal transgressions, and then say, whether he himself is not an astonishing monument of God’s forbearance.

But if we so admire the sparing mercy of our God, what shall we say of his *redeeming* mercy? What words can we ever find sufficient to express the wonders of God’s love, in substituting his own Son, his co-equal, co-eternal Son, in our place, and laying the iniquities of a ruined world on HIM? Here we are altogether lost in wonder. The idea of redemption is so vast, that we cannot grasp it. We assent to it; we believe it; we trust in it: but it so far exceeds all our comprehension, that it appears rather like “a cunningly-devised fable,” than a reality. We see a little of the *suitableness and sufficiency* of this salvation; but it is only “as in a glass darkly;” it is only enigmatically^a that we view it at all; spelling it out, as it were, from a few scattered hints, and guessing at what we cannot comprehend. The *freeness* with which it is offered also, no less surpasses knowledge. By the way in which God himself follows us with offers, and entreaties, it should seem almost as if *his* happiness, rather than *ours*, depended on our acceptance of it. The *continuance* of these offers, made as they are from year to year to people who only pour contempt upon them, and trample on that adorable Saviour who shed his blood for them,—O! what an emphasis does *this* give to that expression in our text, “His merciful kindness is *great* towards us!”

Should not the whole universe adore our God for THIS?]

2. The inviolability of his truth—

[Were his truth considered in reference to his threatenings, it would be an awful subject indeed: but we are called to notice it at present only in connexion with his promises. All the mercy which God was pleased to vouchsafe to man, he has

^a See 1 Cor. xiii. 12. the Greek.

made over to us by an everlasting covenant, which was confirmed with an oath, and ratified with the blood of his only dear Son. There is not any thing which fallen man can want, for body or for soul, for time or for eternity, which has not been made the subject of a distinct promise. And who ever heard of one single promise failing him who trusted in it? Who ever heard of one sinner rejected, who came to God in the way prescribed? To the Jewish nation many specific promises were made: Did any one of them fail? Did not Joshua, after the final settlement of the Jews in Canaan, bear testimony for God in this respect, in the presence of the whole assembled nation, and appeal to them for the truth of his assertions^b? And have not all of you, who have ever rested in, and pleaded, God's gracious promises, been constrained to bear a similar testimony in his behalf?

Let the whole world then adore and magnify the Lord on this ground; and never be weary of acknowledging, that "his mercy endureth for ever^c."]]

Let us now proceed to consider the psalm,
II. With a more immediate reference to the Gentile world—

The psalm is in reality a prophecy; and so important a prophecy, that St. Paul expressly quotes one part of it^d, and gives, as it were, an explanation of the remainder^e.

It declares the calling of the Gentiles—

[In this sense it has been interpreted, even by some of the Jews themselves: and we are sure that this is its true import, because an inspired Apostle has put this construction upon it. And are not we ourselves evidences of its truth? Are not *we* Gentiles? and has not God's mercy reached unto *us*? Are not his promises also fulfilled to *us*? The promise to Abraham was, that "in him, and in his seed, should *all the nations of the earth* be blessed:" and this promise was made to him whilst he was yet uncircumcised, in order that the interest which we uncircumcised Gentiles had in it might be more fully manifest^f. Behold then, *we* are living witnesses both of God's mercy and truth! His promises are fulfilled to us, yea, and are yet daily fulfilling before our eyes. The blessings of salvation are poured down upon us in rich abundance. The Church is daily enlarging on every side of us. Both at home and abroad is the Gospel

^b Josh. xxiii. 14.

^c See Ps. cxxxvi. where it is repeated twenty-six times in as many verses.

^d Rom. xv. 11.

^e Rom. xv. 8, 9. where God's *truth* and *mercy* are both specified, as illustrated and confirmed by Christ.

^f Rom. iv. 11.

running and glorified, to an extent that has never been seen since the Apostolic age. And the time for its universal diffusion through the whole earth is manifestly drawing nigh. We have seen enough with our eyes to assure us, that the fuller accomplishment of God's promises may be expected in due season: and that, at the appointed hour, "all the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdom of our God, and of his Christ."]

In this view, all the Gentile world are called upon to bless and praise their God—

[Ye, who are here assembled, arise and praise your God. Consider what mercy has been shewn to *you*: consider what *truth* has been displayed towards *you*. Arise, I say; yea, again and again would I repeat it, Arise and praise your God! And, ye remotest nations of the earth, O that our voice could reach to you! O that ye knew your obligations to your God, and the blessings that are in reserve for you! The Saviour was called, "The Desire of all nations:" and such indeed he ought to be. Well! if ye know him not, and consequently rejoice not in him, we will rejoice for you: for he is coming to you: the messengers of the Lord of Hosts are going forth into every quarter of the globe; and the word that reveals him to you is translating, in purpose and intention at least, into all the languages of the earth; and we anticipate with joy the time, when all the heathen shall serve him, and "all flesh shall see the salvation of God."]

ADDRESS—

1. Are there any amongst you who have no disposition to praise the Lord?

[Alas! there are too many, who have no delight in this blessed work, and have never spent one hour in it in all their lives! Ah! wretched and ingrate! What think ye of yourselves? Are ye not blind, when ye cannot see the perfections of your God? Are ye not base, when ye can receive such mercies at God's hands, and never acknowledge them? Are ye not brutish, yea, worse than brutish? for "the ox and ass know their owner; but ye know not," nor acknowledge, your Creator, your Benefactor, your Redeemer. See how far you are from a truly Christian state! Tell me not of your moral qualities; ye are base ungrateful creatures: and, if a fellow-creature were to treat you as you treat your God, you would abhor him utterly. O repent, and embrace the mercy that is yet offered you! or else you will find that He, who is true to his promises, will be true to his threatenings also.]

2. Are there amongst you some who desire to praise the Lord?

[We believe it; we rejoice in it: we pray to God to

increase their number a hundredfold. But do ye not find that your thanks and praises are infinitely short of what the occasion for them demands? Yes, methinks there is nothing so humiliating to a Christian as the services which he attempts to render to his God. However, still go on to serve him as ye *can*, when ye cannot serve him as ye *would*. And, to quicken your zeal, contemplate much and deeply the greatness of God's mercy to you, and the inviolability of his truth. God has designed that such contemplations should be a rich source of comfort to yourselves, as they will be also of love and gratitude to him. And, whilst your own souls are filled with these divine affections, endeavour to diffuse the sacred flame, that all around you, and, if possible, all the nations of the world, may be stirred up to render unto God the praises due unto his name.]

DCXCIV.

THE EXALTATION OF CHRIST A GROUND OF CONFIDENCE.

Ps. cxviii. 27, 28. *God is the Lord which hath shewed us light : bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar. Thou art my God, and I will praise thee ; thou art my God, I will exalt thee.*

HOWEVER plainly this psalm refers to David, we are sure that a greater than David is here. The words as applied to David, convey an exceedingly grand and important meaning. He had met with many obstacles in his advancement to the throne of Israel. Oftentimes had his life been sought by Saul : and since the death of Saul there were many formidable conspiracies against him. No sooner was he made king over Israel, than the Philistines sought, and *that* repeatedly, to destroy him^a ; and it was only through the special intervention of God himself that he was able to prevail against them. It appears that many other of the surrounding nations also conspired against him^b ; but through the same Almighty power he was enabled to subdue them. At last, after more than seven years' opposition from all the tribes of Israel^c, he was firmly fixed upon the throne, and "the stone which had been so long rejected of the builders, was made the head of the corner^d." This

^a 2 Sam. v. 17, 18, 22.

^b ver. 10—12. *Four times* does he repeat, and, in the last, with a very expressive simile, "They compassed me about."

^c 2 Sam. v. 4, 5.

^d ver. 22.

event reflected great “light” upon all God’s purposes respecting him. Darkness had hung over him for a long period; but it was now dispelled; and he saw clearly these two important truths, *That God’s counsel, by whomsoever opposed, shall stand; and, that they who trust in the Lord, however tried they may be, shall never be confounded.*

But, as we said, a greater than David is here. It was generally acknowledged amongst the Jews themselves that David was a type of the Messiah, and that this psalm had an especial reference to Him who was in due time to sit upon the throne of David. Hence the acclamations which were used by the people on the occasion of David’s installation, were used by the Jews in reference to Christ^e: and he vindicated their conduct in this particular^f: and afterwards appealed to this very psalm in confirmation of his predictions respecting his rejection by them, and his subsequent elevation to the throne of David^g. In like manner, after the death and resurrection of Christ, St. Peter, “when he was filled with the Holy Ghost,” expressly applied to Christ this very passage, and affirmed in the presence of all the Rulers and Elders of Israel that it was accomplished in the exaltation of that Jesus whom they had crucified^h.

Now in this event, the exaltation of Christ to the throne of glory, God has indeed “shewed us light:” and it will be a profitable subject for our meditation at this time, if we consider,

I. The light which God has shewn us—

Previous to the resurrection of Christ, all was darkness: the disciples themselves doubted whether they had not been deceived in their expectations respecting him. But from that event, and his consequent ascension to the right hand of God, we learn infallibly,

1. The efficacy of his atonement—

[Had he not risen, we might have conceived of him as a great Prophet indeed, but as nothing more than a prophet, who, like multitudes who had preceded him, sealed his doctrines with

^e Matt. xxi. 9.

^g Matt. xxi. 42.

^f Matt. xxi. 16.

^h Acts iv. 8, 11.

his own blood. But he had spoken of his death as a ransom to be paid for the souls of men: and how could we have known that that ransom was accepted, if his resurrection, which he himself taught his disciples to look forward to as the proof and evidence of his acceptance, had not been effected? But when we see that he did rise from the dead, and did ascend to heaven in the presence of his disciples, and did send down the Holy Spirit according to his word to bear testimony concerning him, there is no room left for doubt: we are perfectly sure that his offering was accepted of the Father, and that by his obedience unto death he has wrought out eternal redemption for us^l.]

2. The sufficiency of his grace—

[Even when our blessed Lord was on earth, the whole creation, animate and inanimate, terrestrial and infernal, were obedient to his will: how much more therefore, now that he is exalted to the right hand of the Majesty on high, and has all fulness treasured up in him for the benefit of his people, must he be able to “do all things which we call upon him for!” If he says, as he did to St. Paul, “My grace is sufficient for thee,” we may safely adopt St. Paul’s language, and say, “I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me.” If all enemies are put under his feet, they shall assuredly be put under ours also: even “Satan himself shall be bruised under our feet shortly.”]

3. The excellency of his salvation—

[Behold what has taken place with respect to him! He is exalted to the throne of God, and possessed of all the glory which he had with the Father before the worlds were made. The same glory is reserved for us also^k, and a participation of that very throne which his Father has given to him^l. Believer, contemplate all the glory and felicity of your exalted Head; and then see what is prepared for all his members: “your body shall be like unto his glorious body;” your soul shall be transformed into his perfect image; and all the glory which his Father has given him, shall be your inalienable and everlasting inheritance^m.]

What a glorious light is this! Let it lead us to contemplate,

II. The returns which it calls for at our hands—

Surely such discoveries as are here made to us should call forth our devoutest affections: they should lead us,

1. To surrender up ourselves entirely to God—

^l Rom. i. 4. and viii. 34.

^k Luke xxii. 29.

^l Rev. iii. 21.

^m John xvii. 22. 1 Pet. i. 4.

[The sacrifices which David and Solomon offered unto God were almost without numberⁿ: but the sacrifice of a broken and contrite spirit, or of a devout and grateful heart, outweighs them all^o. Whether the sacrifices were ever “bound to the horns of the altar,” we are not informed: but sure enough our hearts need to be bound; for they are ever ready to “start aside as a broken bow,” and “to backslide from God as a backsliding heifer:” and we should labour incessantly to say with David, “O God, my heart is fixed, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise.” The example of Abraham may assist us in this particular. The offering of his son was a dark dispensation: but, when God arrested the arm of Abraham, and forbade him to inflict the fatal wound, a light beamed in upon his soul; he saw a risen Saviour presented to him under the image of his restored son: and instantly “he took the ram which was caught in the thicket, and offered him up for a burnt-offering in the stead of his son^p.” Let the sight of a risen Saviour operate in like manner upon us; let us take the offering which all of us have at hand, and which we know will be pleasing to the Lord, even “the offering of a free heart,” and let us present it a living sacrifice to God, as our reasonable and most delightful service^q.]

2. To rejoice and glory in God as our portion for ever—

[Like Paul, we may say of Christ, “He has loved *me*, and given himself for *me*.” Indeed, without this appropriation of God and his blessings to our own souls, we can never attain to a joyful and thankful spirit: but it is the privilege of every believer to say of Christ, “He is my friend, He is my beloved.” God approves of this language, by whomsoever used, provided only it be used in sincerity and truth; “Thou art *my* God, and I will praise thee; thou art *my* God, I will exalt thee.” If under the Old Testament, believers could say, “My beloved is mine, and I am his,” much more may we regard him as “the strength of our heart, and our portion for ever.”]

ADDRESS—

1. To those who are yet in darkness—

[Long was the night with which David was enclosed, in-somuch that he sometimes feared he should “one day perish by the hands of Saul:” yet at last the day dawned upon him, and “God shewed him light.” Dark also were the dispensations towards our blessed Lord, till in his resurrection and ascension the

ⁿ 1 Chron. xxix. 21. 1 Kings viii. 62, 63.

^o Ps. l. 13, 14. and li. 16, 17.

^p Gen. xxii. 13.

^q Rom. xii. 1. with Heb. xiii. 15.

true light was made to shine. Let not any of us then indulge desponding fears: let us know assuredly, that "the counsel of God shall stand," and that "they who trust in him shall never be confounded." Indeed even "in our darkness the Lord will be a light unto us;" and soon "our light shall rise in obscurity, and our darkness be as the noon-day."

2. To those who have been "brought out of darkness into God's marvellous light"—

[Happy, happy ye, who behold a risen Saviour, and see the fulness which ye have in him! Ye may be sweetly assured, that, as he is able, so also he is engaged, to "save your souls to the uttermost, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for you." But let this light have its proper influence upon your minds. "Walk as children of the light" and of the day: yea, "walk in the light, as he is in the light." If you do indeed "behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," "*it is God the Lord who hath shewn it to you;*" and "ye, as his peculiar people, are called to shew forth his praises^r." Do this then in the way before prescribed: give up yourselves wholly unto him; and take him as your only, your everlasting, portion.]

^r 1 Pet. ii. 9.

DCXCV.

PRACTICAL RELIGION ENFORCED.

Ps. cxix. 4—6. *Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently. O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes! Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments.*

IT is impossible to read the psalm before us and not see that true religion is altogether of a practical nature. Doubtless, in the first instance, the Inspired Volume reveals to us a way of reconciliation with our offended God, through the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ: but its ultimate object is, to bring our hearts into a conformity to the mind and will of God. In the words before us we see all that is most interesting to the child of God:

I. His indispensable duties—

God commands us, not only to return to him in a way of penitence, but to walk before him in a way of holy obedience.

This he requires throughout the Holy Scriptures—

[He requires it by Moses^a, and the prophets^b; by Christ also^c, and his holy Apostles^d. Indeed, to bring us to holiness of heart and life was the very end for which he gave his only-begotten Son^e, and for which Christ himself died^f. And every command is enforced with an authority which it is at our peril to disregard^g.]

He requires, too, that in this duty we exert ourselves with “diligence”—

[This is again and again insisted on^h, both in relation to the keeping of the heartⁱ, and to the whole of our deportment through life^k. We are particularly called to “*set our heart*” to this work^l, that we may understand it in all its parts, and perform it in its utmost extent. In a word, “This is the will of God, even our sanctification^m.”]

How the true saint stands affected towards his duties, may here be seen in,

II. His impassioned desire—

The perfection of a Christian is seen far more in his desires than in his actual attainments.

He feels and mourns over his manifold defects—

[It might be supposed, that the more holy any man were, the more self-complacent he would be: but the very reverse of this is the truth: for, the more holy any man is, the clearer and more enlarged are his views of God’s holy law, and, consequently, the deeper his sense of his short-comings and defectsⁿ. Hence he complains with St. Paul, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?”]

He desires the gift of God’s Holy Spirit, to remedy these defects—

[He knows, by sad experience how liable he is to be deceived, even whilst he is endeavouring to do the will of God. “His heart is deceitful^p,” and easily betrayed into error, by its prejudices, its passions, its interests. And sin itself also is deceitful, putting on, in ten thousand instances, the garb of holiness, and the semblance of duty^q. And Satan is a subtle adversary, that has at command ten thousand wiles and devices, whereby to ensnare him^r. What, then, shall the Christian do? He can look only to God, for the gift of his Holy Spirit to guide him aright and to direct his steps^s. Hence, from his

^a Deut. v. 29.

^b Jer. vii. 22, 23.

^c Matt. xxviii. 20.

^d 1 Pet. i. 15, 16.

^e 1 John iii. 8.

^f Tit. ii. 4.

^g Jam. ii. 10—12.

^h Deut. xi. 13, 18, 22.

ⁱ Prov. iv. 23.

^k 2 Pet. i. 10. and iii. 14.

^l Deut. xxxii. 46.

^m 1 Thess. iv. 3.

ⁿ Rom. vii. 9.

^o Rom. vii. 24.

^p Jer. xvii. 9.

^q Heb. iii. 13.

^r 2 Cor. xi. 3.

^s Prov. iii. 6.

inmost soul, he prays, "Hold thou me up, O Lord!" yea, "Direct my heart into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ's future advent!"

But, in the midst of all his troubles, we may behold,

III. His assured encouragement—

Were he left to himself, he well knows he must perish. But "his hope is in the Lord his God."

That which is required of him, is, to be upright before God—

[God "requireth truth in the inward parts^x." However defective we be in our *attainments*, there must be no insincerity in our *desires*. We must "account all God's commandments concerning all things to be right, and must hate every false way^y." In our regard to them, there must be "no partiality, no hypocrisy^z:" the smallest commandment must not be considered as light^a, nor the greatest be deemed "grievous^b." "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do^e?" must be his daily prayer; and to fulfil every command of God, the constant habit of his mind.]

With this one acquisition, he has nothing to fear—

["God will uphold the upright man^d." Satan may tempt him; his own in-dwelling corruptions may assault him; and he may at times be so harassed, as to be almost at his wit's end^e;" but "God will keep him, by his own power, through faith, unto everlasting salvation^f." The weaker the Christian feels himself, the more "will God perfect his own strength in his weakness^g;" nor shall "the hope that has been formed in him ever make him ashamed^h:" no: "he shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation; and shall not be ashamed or confounded, world without endⁱ."]

Be ye then, Brethren, CHRISTIANS INDEED—

[Get just views of your duty, both towards God and man — — — And be like-minded with God in relation to it, desiring nothing but to be, and do, all that God himself requires — — — And know where all your help and hope is; not in yourselves, but in the Lord your God, who alone can "guide you by his counsel, so as ultimately to bring you to his glory^k" — — — And "may the God of peace, who brought again from

^t Ps. xvii. 5.

^y ver. 128.

^b 1 John v. 3.

^e Ps. lxxvii. 7—9.

^h Rom. v. 5.

^u 2 Thess. iii. 5.

^z Jam. iii. 17.

^c Acts ix. 6.

^f 1 Pet. i. 5.

ⁱ Isai. xlv. 17.

^x Ps. li. 6.

^a Matt. v. 19.

^d Ps. xxxvii. 17.

^g 2 Cor. xii. 9.

^k Ps. lxxiii. 24.

the dead our Lord Jesus, make you perfect in every good work, to do his will; working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ! to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen!"]

¹ Heb. xiii. 20, 21.

DCXCVI.

GOD'S WORD THE MEANS OF SANCTIFICATION.

Ps. cxix. 9. *Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?
By taking heed thereto according to thy word.*

THERE is much despondency in the human mind, especially in reference to the great work of sanctification. There are many who wish to become holy; but they know not how: they would mortify sin; but they cannot: they would serve God in newness of life; but to attempt it, appears to them a hopeless task. The people of the world, if exhorted to give themselves up to God, do not hesitate to affirm that, in the existing state of things, it is impossible: and many who have begun to do this in their own strength, and found its insufficiency for so great a work, have given up in despair, and returned to their former state of carelessness and indifference. But, whilst we acknowledge the impossibility of serving God aright by any strength of our own, we must deny that it is altogether impracticable to fulfil his will. On the contrary, if any man ask, "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?" we are prepared to answer, that it may be done, "by taking heed thereto, according to God's word."

We have here,

I. A difficulty proposed—

"How shall a young man cleanse his way?"

If this question were asked in reference only to *outward defilements*, it would not be without its difficulties—

[Consider to what temptations a young man is exposed. Those which arise from within, are exceeding great — — — And they are continually strengthened by those occurring from without. Every thing he sees around him has a tendency to

foster and to gratify some bad passion ; whilst the examples on every side countenance and encourage the indulgence of it. To render evil the less formidable, every one agrees to strip it of its proper names, and to affix to it some gentle appellation that shall conceal its odiousness, and cast a veil over its deformity. Nay, as if it were not sufficient to cloke its malignity, many become its panders and its advocates, and endeavour to laugh out of the world all that squeamishness that betrays a fear of evil, and an aversion to the commission of it. Is it any wonder if young men, so circumstanced, fall into sin? or is it easy for them to keep their garments clean in such an ensnaring and polluting world as this? — — —]

But if the question be asked in reference to *the sanctity which God requires*, the difficulty will appear great indeed—

[It is not a Pharisaic righteousness, a cleansing of the outside of the cup and platter, that God requires, but real holiness, both of heart and life. We must seek to be “cleansed from secret faults,” as well as from those which are more open; and never account our end fully accomplished, till we are “pure as the Lord Jesus Christ is pure,” and “perfect as our Father which is in heaven is perfect.” But how shall a young man *so* cleanse his way? How shall he “mortify the whole body of sin,” keeping in subjection so many unruly appetites, correcting so many unhallowed dispositions, and putting forth into constant exercise so many heavenly graces as are comprehended in real piety? Indeed, we may ask, How shall young persons of either sex *so* walk before God? In respect of outward decorum, females, from the restraints of education, have a great advantage: perhaps, in reference to vital godliness also, they may be considered as more favoured than the other sex, because they have more opportunity for serious reflection. But real piety is uncongenial with our fallen nature; and to attain it is no easy task to any, of either sex, or of whatever age or quality or condition. The very names by which the divine life is described in Scripture sufficiently shew that it is neither attained nor exercised without great difficulty. A “race,” a “wrestling for the mastery,” a “warring of a good warfare,” all require much exertion; and not for a moment only, but till the victory is accomplished. It must be confessed, therefore, that a young man’s course is very difficult; that “strait is the gate, and narrow is the way,” in which he has to walk; and that if ever he gain “the kingdom of heaven, he must take it by violence.”]

Happy is it for us, however, that we have, on divine authority,

II. The difficulty solved—

To the question asked, “How shall he cleanse his way?” the answer is given, even “by taking heed thereto according to thy word.” The Holy Scriptures afford, to every human being,

1. A sure directory—

[There may doubtless be particular cases, even to our dying hour, in which it may be difficult to discover the precise line of duty. But, for the most part, the way of righteousness is clearly defined; and it is our own blindness only that makes it appear intricate or doubtful. There is no corruption of the heart which is not there condemned, nor any holy affection which is not there delineated. There every thing is described in its proper colours: piety is exalted as the perfection of our nature; and sin is declared to be “an abomination in the sight of God.” The example of our blessed Lord also is there portrayed with the utmost exactness; so that, whatever doubt might obscure a precept, the true light is reflected on it, and a perfect standard is exhibited before us. It cannot be through ignorance, therefore, that any shall err, if only they will make use of the light afforded them in God’s blessed word.]

2. Sufficient encouragement—

[There is not a precept in the whole inspired volume which is not made also the subject of a promise. God has engaged to “give us a new heart, and to renew within us a right spirit, and to cleanse us from our filthiness and from all our idols:” so that, however inveterate any lust may be, here is provision against it; and however arduous any duty be, here is sufficient strength promised for the performance of it. How effectual the word is, when duly improved, may be seen in the general description given of it by the Psalmist: “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. Moreover, by them is thy servant warned; and in keeping of them there is great reward^a.” Here, whether in respect of direction or efficacy, its sufficiency for our necessities is fully declared. But yet more satisfactory is the declaration of St. Peter, when he affirms, that by “the exceeding great and precious promises of Scripture we may be made partakers of the divine nature, and be enabled to escape the corruption that is in the world through lust^b.” By the

^a Ps. xix. 7—11.

^b 2 Pet. i. 4.

word, therefore, we may cleanse our way; not externally only, but really, truly, spiritually, and to the full extent of our necessities: so that the difficulty in our text is completely solved; and to the inquiry there made, we are prepared to answer, "Having these promises, dearly Beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God^c."]]

ADDRESS—

1. Let the Scriptures of Truth be studied by you—

[Do not form your standard by the opinions of men, or labour to cleanse your way by superstitious observances that have been devised by man; but look to the word of God as the proper rule of your conduct, and seek for holiness in the way that is there prescribed. Be careless in your way, and your ruin will ensue^d — — — But let the word of Christ dwell in you richly "in all wisdom;" and you shall find it the power of God to the salvation of your souls.]

2. Devote to piety your early youth—

["Remember your Creator in the days of your youth," says Solomon. You must not stay till you are advanced in life before you "cleanse your way," but engage in that work while yet you are "young." In the appointment of the sacrifices which were offered under the Law, the lambs were to be but a year old: and in the first-fruits presented unto God for a meat-offering, special care was to be taken that "*green ears*" should be offered, "beaten out indeed of full ears," but still *green*, and needing to be "dried with fire" before they could be ground to flour^e. Does not this shew what use is to be made of our early youth? Methinks, it speaks powerfully: and I pray God that this day the greenest ears amongst you may be consecrated to the Lord, and receive from him some blessed tokens of his favourable acceptance. Let the youngest, who are as new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word; and they shall grow thereby^f:" and let the "young men have the word of God abiding in them; and they shall overcome the wicked one^g."]]

3. Live in the daily habit of self-examination—

[Inward and unperceived uncleanness will come upon you, if you be not always on your guard. A mariner may be drawn from his course by currents, as well as driven by winds: and therefore from day to day, he consults his compass and his chart, to see whether there have been any deviation from his destined path. The same precautions must be used by you.

^c 2 Cor. vii. 1.

^d Eccl. xi. 9.

^e Lev. ii. 14—16.

^f 1 Pet. ii. 2.

^g 1 John ii. 14.

You must not only “examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith,” but what progress you are making in the faith. Do this, beloved, daily, and with all diligence; so shall ye “be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, shining among them as lights in the world, and holding forth in your walk and conversation the word of life^h,” and be assured, that in so ordering your conversation aright, “you shall at last behold the salvation of God.”]

^h Phil. ii. 15, 16.

DCXCVII.

HOW TO ATTAIN DIVINE KNOWLEDGE.

Ps. cxix. 18. *Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law!*

THE necessity of Divine teaching, in order to a spiritual acquaintance with the truth of God, is by many denied; and all expectation of the Holy Spirit's influence for that end is derided as enthusiasm. But, however the profane ungodly world may scoff at the idea, it is “by the Spirit of God alone that we can know the things which are freely given to us of God^a,” and the wisest of men, as much as the most ignorant, has reason to adopt the petition in our text, “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law!”

From these words we shall take occasion to shew, I. What wondrous things are contained in God's law—

If we understand the law here spoken of, as importing the Law of Moses, it certainly is full of wonders: the moral law, being a perfect transcript of the mind of God; and the ceremonial law, being a shadow of all those good things which are revealed to us in the Gospel. But we apprehend that David is speaking rather of the Gospel, even of that “law which is come forth from Zion, and that word which has proceeded from Jerusalem.” No one of the prophets, scarcely excepting even Isaiah himself, had clearer or richer views of Christ than David; and as he speaks of Christ in almost all his psalms, we may justly suppose, that in this place he refers to the wonders that are contained in the Gospel of Christ.

^a 1 Cor. ii. 12.

Consider the Gospel generally—

[In it is revealed salvation, salvation purchased by the blood and righteousness of God's only-begotten Son. What a mystery is this! The God of heaven and earth assuming our nature, that in that nature he may expiate the guilt of a ruined world! We are accustomed to hear of this, and therefore listen to it without emotion: but what should we think of it, if it now reached our ears for the first time? Truly "great is this mystery of godliness!" We, through unbelief and indifference, think little of it: but "the angels," though infinitely less interested in it than we, "desire day and night to look into it," and to comprehend, if it were possible, the heights and depths of love that are contained in it^b.]

Consider it more particularly—

[Mark well the character of this salvation; its *freeness*, its *fulness*, its *suitableness*! It is as *free* as the light we see, or the air we breathe. It has come to us unsolicited, unsought: and it is given to us "without money and without price^c." The whole world are invited to come to Christ as to an overflowing fountain, and to "take of the water of life freely^d." So *full* is it, that it neither wants, nor is capable of, any addition. Nothing is left to be supplied by man: he gives nothing, but receives all. "All is treasured up for us in Christ^e," "who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and complete redemption^f." If only we are content to receive out of his fulness, we shall never lack any thing that is necessary either for our present or eternal happiness^g. And this is exactly such a salvation as is *suitable* to fallen man. If we were required to add any thing to what Christ has done and suffered for us, in order to render it sufficient for our salvation, what could we add? What have we of our own, but sin? The more any one knows of himself, the more he would despair, if any thing were required of him, as a price whereby to purchase an interest in Christ. Doubtless we must repent, and believe, and obey the Gospel, before we can be saved: but repentance, faith, and obedience, though necessary as means to an end, *merit* nothing at the hands of God; nor have we of ourselves any sufficiency for those things: even those graces are wrought in us by the Spirit of God, who "gives us both to will and to do of his own good pleasure." Salvation, from first to last, is altogether of grace; and therefore it is equally suitable to all; to the thief when dying on the cross, as to Nicodemus, or Nathanael, whose whole life and conduct had been so exemplary, and who lived to adorn the doctrine they professed.

^b 1 Pet. i. 12.

^c Isai. lv. 1.

^d Rev. xxii. 17.

^e Col. i. 19.

^f 1 Cor. i. 30.

^g John i. 16. Gal. ii. 20.

Contemplate *these things*, and say whether they contain not “wonders” that surpass the comprehension, both of men and angels? — — —]

From the text however we may learn,

II. How we are to attain the knowledge of them—

Doubtless we must “search the Scriptures,” and that with all diligence^h. But, if we search them in dependence on our own wisdom, we shall never succeed. We must look up to God for the teachings of his good Spirit, even as David did, and pray, “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.”

This is the way *prescribed by God*—

[God regards all men as blind^l, and incapable of comprehending spiritual things, till he himself has opened their eyes, and given them a spiritual discernment^k — — — Hence he counsels all to come to the Lord Jesus Christ “for eye-salve, that they may see^l,” and to look to him as the only Author of true wisdom^m. He represents it as the Holy Spirit’s office to take of the things that are Christ’s, and to shew them unto usⁿ;” and to bring home to the minds of men a clear perception of those various truths which are most of all interesting to their souls. He considers all men as equally under the necessity of submitting to the teachings of his Spirit^o. The efforts of those who lean to their own understanding, he derides^p, and will communicate to “babes the things which he conceals from the wise and prudent^q.” True it is, that God uses both the written and preached word as the means of conveying instruction: but the due reception of that instruction he ascribes to the operation of his own almighty power^r. Even the disciples whom Jesus himself had instructed for three or four years, were not able rightly to apprehend his word, till “he opened their understandings to understand the Scriptures^s :” and, when Peter confessed his Lord to be the Christ, he was expressly told, that “flesh and blood had not revealed it” to him, but God himself^t. Be it known then to all, that every child of man, whether learned or unlearned, must “hear and learn of the Father,” who is “the Father of lights, and from whom cometh every good and perfect gift^u.”]

This is the way *pursued by the saints* in all ages—

^h John v. 39. ⁱ Rev. iii. 17. ^k 1 Cor. ii. 14. Eph. iv. 18.

^l Rev. iii. 18. ^m Jam. i. 5. ⁿ John xvi. 8, 11, 13, 14.

^o John vi. 45. ^p 1 Cor. i. 19, 20. ^q Matt. xi. 25.

^r 1 Cor. iii. 5—7. ^s Luke xxiv. 45. ^t Matt. xvi. 17.

^u Jam. i. 17.

[Who more instructed than David? yet he was not ashamed to seek from God a spiritual illumination. The saints at Ephesus were inferior to no Church whatever, in a comprehension of divine truth: yet did St. Paul pray for them, that they might yet further “be enlightened by the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, through whose gracious influences alone they could grow either in knowledge or in grace^x. If we look to those of later times, we find this truth acknowledged by all, excepting those infidels who “deny the Lord that bought them.” The Reformers of our Church have most unequivocally sanctioned the use of these means, and encouraged us to look up to God for “the inspiration of his Spirit,” “that we may both perceive and know what things we ought to do, and also have grace and power faithfully to fulfil the same^y.” Let us not be contented with any efforts of our own, or any instructions from man; but let us “cry after knowledge, and lift up our voice for understanding, knowing that it is the Lord alone who giveth wisdom, and that out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding^z.”]

ADDRESS—

1. To those who are studying the Holy Scriptures—

[It is surprising what pains many take to acquire a *critical* knowledge of the Bible, whilst yet they remain contentedly ignorant of those deep things which none but God can teach. But let me entreat you to seek above all things to behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, even that glory which He only who commanded light to shine out of darkness can make known unto you^a — — —]

2. To those who, though incapable of entering critically into the letter of the Scriptures, have yet, through grace, a knowledge of the spiritual truths contained in them—

[Blessed be God, there are some amongst us, of whom, though unskilled in human knowledge, it may be said, “To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.” “They were once blind; but now they see:” “They were once darkness; but are now light in the Lord.” Be thankful to him who has so highly favoured and distinguished you^b; and endeavour to walk worthy of him who has vouchsafed unto you this invaluable blessing^c. If ye be “light in the Lord, then walk as children of the light” and of the day^d.]

^x Eph. i. 17, 18.

^y See Collects for First Sunday after Epiphany; and for Whitsunday.

^z Prov. ii. 1—6.

^a 2 Cor. iv. 6.

^b 1 Cor. i. 27, 28.

^c 1 Pet. ii. 9.

^d Eph. v. 8.

DCXCVIII.

DAVID'S DESIRE AFTER GOD'S WORD.

Ps. cxix. 20. *My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times.*

IN general, there is no other connexion between the different verses of this psalm, than the accidental one of their beginning with the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet: yet possibly the collocation of them may occasionally have been determined by their bearing upon some particular point. The whole psalm is an eulogy upon the word of God, and a declaration of the love which David bare towards it. And, whilst we apprehend that every distinct sentence was put down as it occurred to the Psalmist's mind, without any particular dependence on its context, we suppose that, in the arrangement of some parts, there may have been a design in placing some observations so as to confirm or enforce others which had preceded them. In the 18th verse, David had said, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy Law:" and in the two following verses, as they stand, he may be considered as enforcing that petition; first, by the consideration of the shortness of his continuance here; and, then, by the exceeding greatness of his wish to obtain the desired blessing: "I am a stranger in the earth: hide not thy commandments from me. My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times." Now, this expression being so exceeding strong, I will take occasion from it to point out,

I. The intensity of his desire after the word of God—

Often does he say that he has "longed" for God's word^a; but here he says, "*My soul breaketh* for the longing that it hath." To enter into the force of this expression, let us compare his desire after God's word with the desire felt by others in cases of extreme emergency.

^a ver. 40, 131, 174.

Let us compare it with the desire of,

1. A hunted deer—

[Let us conceive of a deer that has for many hours been fleeing from its pursuers, till its strength is altogether exhausted, and it is ready to faint with fatigue. Let us suppose that its fears are raised to the uttermost, by the rapid advance of its enemies, ready to seize and tear it in pieces. How intense must be its thirst! How gladly would it pause a few moments at a water-brook, to revive its parched frame, and to renovate its strength for further flight! Of this we may form some conception: and it may serve in a measure to convey to us an idea of David's thirst after the judgments of his God. "O God," says he, "thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee; my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is^b." "My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God^c." "*As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.* My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my meat day and night; while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God^d?"]

2. An endangered mariner—

[Mariners for the most part are men of great intrepidity: but when ready to be overwhelmed in the tempestuous ocean, they sink like other men. "When God commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves of the sea, the mariners mount up to the heaven; they go down again to the depths; *their soul is melted because of the trouble.* They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and *are* at their wit's end^e." Such is the description given of them by God himself. But let us take an instance upon record. When Paul was "sailing by Crete, there arose a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon;" and the ship becoming unmanageable, "they let her drive;" and "fearing they should fall into the quicksands, they strake sail, and so were driven." "Being exceedingly tossed with the tempest, they lightened the ship, casting out with their own hands the very tackling" which they had stowed up for the management of the ship. In this perilous condition they continued a whole fortnight, not having taken during all that time so much as one regular meal. St. Paul, in the immediate prospect of having the ship dashed to pieces, and no hope remaining to any of them of safety unless on broken pieces of the ship, said to them, "This is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing: wherefore I pray you to take some meat; for this is

^b Ps. lxxiii. 1. ^c Ps. lxxxiv. 2. ^d Ps. xlii. 1—3. ^e Ps. cvii. 25—27.

for your health;" he administered to them some bread, and then "cast into the sea the very wheat" with which the ship was provisioned; and soon "the ship ran aground, and was broken in pieces by the violence of the waves^f." How must all this crew have longed for safety! How must their "soul have broken for the longing which they had" to escape from their peril! Yet not even this exceeded the desire which David had for the word of God.]

3. A deserted soul—

[This will come nearer to the point. The feelings of a hunted deer or an endangered mariner are merely natural: but those of a deserted soul are spiritual, and therefore more suited to illustrate those which David speaks of in our text. See the state of a deserted soul in Job: "O that my grief were thoroughly weighed, and my calamity laid in the balances together! for now it would be heavier than the sand of the sea; therefore my words are swallowed up. For the arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit: the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me^g." Or take the case recorded in the 88th Psalm: "Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves. Mine eye mourneth by reason of affliction. Lord, I have called daily upon thee; I have stretched out my hands unto thee. Lord, why casteth thou off my soul? Why hidest thou thy face from me? I am afflicted, and ready to die from my youth up: while I suffer thy terrors, I am distracted. Thy fierce wrath goeth over me; thy terrors have cut me off^h." Here we see what is meant by *the soul breaking* for the longing that it hath after God. And there is in this psalm another verse, which, to one who has ever felt what it is to have *an overwhelming desire after God*, will convey the true import of my text: "I opened my mouth and panted: for I longed for thy commandmentsⁱ."

Nor was this a sudden emotion on some extraordinary occasion: no; it was the constant habit of David's mind: it was what he felt "*at all times*:" "My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments *at all times*."]

I am aware that this may appear extravagant. But we must remember that this expression was not

^f Acts xxvii. 14—41.

^g Job vi. 2—4.

^h Ps. lxxxviii. 6, 7, 9, 14, 15, 16.

ⁱ ver. 131. This is sadly weakened by Commentators, who interpret it as referring to a person running or oppressed with heat. The sigh of one *overwhelmed* with a desire after God, expresses the very thing.

a poetic fiction, but an argument solemnly addressed to the heart-searching God. And that it was not stronger than the occasion called for, will appear whilst I shew you,

II. The reason of his so longing for God's blessed word—

The reasons that might be assigned are numberless. But I will confine myself to three. He so longed for God's word, because,

1. In it he found God himself—

[In the works of creation somewhat of God may be discerned; but it is in his word alone that all his perfections are displayed, and all his eternal counsels are made known. In this respect, "God has magnified his word above all his name," and al the means whereby he has made himself known to men^k. There he met Jehovah, as Adam met him, amidst the trees of the garden in Paradise. There "he walked with God, and conversed with him as a friend." There he had such "fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ," and such "communion with the Holy Ghost," as he could never find in any other field, nor ever attain but by meditation on the word of God. Can we, then, wonder that he so longed for that word, and that his very soul *brake* for the longing that he had for it? The wonder rather is, that there should be a person upon earth who could have access to that sacred volume, and not so value it — — —]

2. From it he obtained all that his necessities required—

[Did he desire the forgiveness of all his sins? There he found "a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness," a fountain capable of washing him from all the guilt he had contracted in the matter of Bathsheba and Uriah. In reference to those very transactions, and to the efficacy of the atoning blood of Christ, he cries, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow¹." Did he need direction in difficulty, support in trouble, and strength for an unreserved obedience? There he found it all, and from thence derived it in the very hour of need, to the full extent of his necessities. Such were the refreshments which he found there, that corn and wine and oil, and all the delicacies of the universe, could but faintly shadow forth: and thence he derived such treasures as were absolutely unsearchable. Can we wonder, then, that the word of God was, in his estimation, sweeter

^k Ps. cxxxviii. 2.

¹ Ps. li. 7.

than honey and the honey-comb, and infinitely more precious than the finest gold^m ?]

3. By it he gained a foretaste of heaven itself—

[The word was to him as Jacob's ladder, by which he held intercourse with heaven itself. By it he ascended to Mount Pisgah, and surveyed the Promised Land in all its length and breadth. In it he beheld his Saviour, *as it were*, transfigured before his eyes, yea, and seated on his throne of glory, surrounded by myriads of saints and angels; yea, and beheld the very throne reserved for himself, and the crown of glory prepared for him, and the golden harp already tuned for him to bear his part amongst the heavenly choir.

I forbear to speak more on this subject; because, if what I have already spoken do not justify the language of my text, nothing that I can add can be of any weight. Only let any person read this psalm, in which no less than one hundred and seventy-six times the excellency of the sacred volume is set forth in every variety of expression that David could invent; and he will see, that the language of my text was no other than what every child of man should both feel and utter.]

But from all this, who does not SEE—

1. That religion is not a mere form, but a reality?

[Religion, if it be genuine, occupies, not the head, but the heart and soul, every faculty of which it controls and regulates. Religion is in the soul, what the soul is in the body — — — O that we all felt it so! But indeed, Brethren, so it is; and so it must be, if ever we would enjoy the benefits it is intended to convey — — —]

2. That we all have very abundant occasion for shame in a review both of our past and present state?

[We are not, like the unhappy papists, debarred from God's blessed word. The very least and meanest amongst us has free access to it, and may read it for himself; yea, and derive still greater advantage from it than ever David himself reaped; by reason of the rich additions which have been made to it since his day, and the fuller discovery it gives us of God's mind and will. Yet how many of us read it not at all, or only in a formal cursory manner, without any such feeling as that which is expressed in my text! My dear Brethren, we suffer loss, exceeding great loss, by our negligence in this respect. Did we but read the word, and meditate on it day and night, and pray over it, and converse with God by it, what might we not obtain, and what might we not enjoy? Well—I leave it, with “commending you to God and to the word of his grace,

^m Ps. xix. 10.

which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctifiedⁿ." Certain I am that "it is profitable for all that your souls can desire;" and that if you improve it aright, it shall render you perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works^o," and shall "make you wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus^p."]

ⁿ Acts xx. 32.^o 2 Tim. iii. 17.^p 2 Tim. iii. 15.

DCXCIX.

CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.

Ps. cxix. 30—32. *I have chosen the way of truth: thy judgments have I laid before me. I have stuck unto thy testimonies: O Lord, put me not to shame! I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart.*

EVERY thing which has an aspect of egotism is for the most part to be avoided; or, at all events, it should be entered upon with extreme care, and be relinquished as soon as the occasion for it has ceased. Yet, whilst this rule is proper for private Christians, we have reason to be thankful that the Inspired Writers were under no necessity of submitting to it; but that, on the contrary, they were constrained, by the powerful motions of the Holy Spirit, to record the secret workings of their hearts, and to develop the principles by which they were actuated in the divine life. What a treasure has in this view been committed to us in the Psalms of David! In him we see what is the experience of God's saints in every age. In the very words which we have just read we may behold a Christian's mind:

I. His retrospective testimony—

We may take the words as declaring,

1. His deliberate choice—

[Whatever was his state in former life, he is now become a new creature: his former sins and errors he has utterly renounced; and has determinately embraced the truth of God, even that truth which God has revealed in the Gospel of his Son. He knows that, as a sinner, he is justly obnoxious to God's heavy displeasure; and that there is no hope for him, but in that Saviour who died for him upon the cross — — — Hence, with the fullest conviction of his mind and the most

deliberate purpose of his soul, has he “fled for refuge to Christ, and laid hold on him as his only hope.”]

2. The means by which he seeks to effect his end—

[The written word of God is regarded by him as the only ground of his faith, and the only rule of his practice. The promises contained in it he treasures up in his mind, for the encouragement of his soul; and the precepts, as a sure directory. The Sacred Volume is to him what the chart and compass are to the mariner: nor will he ever pass a day without consulting it, to ascertain the state of his soul, and the course that he shall pursue.]

3. The exertions made by him in the prosecution of his purpose—

[No sooner did he turn to God in earnest, than he found allurements, on the one hand, to draw him from the Lord; and menaces, on the other hand, to drive him from his God. But his conscience bears him witness, that “he has stuck unto God’s testimonies,” and “cleaved unto the Lord with full purpose of heart.” True, the conflict yet continues, yea, and requires the utmost exertions of his soul: but still he is “steadfast and immoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord: assured that, at last, his labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.”]

Conformable with his past experience is also,

II. His prospective determination—

He feels, indeed, that God alone can uphold him—

[This is strongly expressed in that prayer, “O Lord, put me not to shame!” In vain would be all his own efforts, if he were not aided from on high. Soon would he fall, and make shipwreck of his faith, and “be put utterly to shame,” if God should withdraw from him for one single moment. He feels himself like an infant in its mother’s arms, and cries to God continually, “Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe.” He laments that in his own heart he is narrow and contracted, and incapable of either devising or executing such plans as may advance his spiritual welfare in the way that he could wish. He seems to himself like a ship that is becalmed; and which, for want of winds to carry him forward, is in danger of being diverted from his path by currents which he is unable to withstand. Hence he prays to God for such communications of his Holy Spirit as shall fill his sails, and bear him onward to his destined port. And,]

In dependence on God, he determines to redouble his exertions till he has attained the great object of his desires—

[He is not contented to “walk” in the ways of God: no; he would “run;” he would “run, and not be weary; he would march onward, and not faint.” He considers himself as engaged in a race: and he sees his course clearly marked in the commandments of his God. Hence he determines, that “when God shall enlarge his heart, he will run with all his might, and never stop till the prize shall be accorded to him. Whatever advance he may have made, “he forgets what is behind, and reaches forward to that which is before, and presses on for the prize of his high calling” with increased zeal. He determines that nothing shall abate his ardour, or for a moment divert him from his path. Thus he runs the race that is set before him; and determines, through grace, “so to run it, that he may obtain the prize.”]

Let me now ADD a few words,

1. Of congratulation, to those who can adopt this language—

[I do hope that some amongst you are like-minded with David in these particulars; and that, if you have not attained his eminence in the divine life, you are yet truly and habitually following his steps. Shall I not, then, say to you, as Moses did to Israel of old, “Happy art thou, O Israel! who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord^a?” Truly, in comparison of you, the greatest, wisest, noblest of mankind are in a poor and low condition. In you the end of your creation has been answered; yea, and the end of your redemption too. In you God delights; yea, he regards you as his peculiar treasure. On you the very angels before the throne account it an honour to wait, as your ministering servants: and for you are prepared crowns and kingdoms that shall never fade away. Was Mary commended by our Lord for having chosen the good part? and was she assured that it should never be taken away from her? The same commendation is yours, and the same assurance is yours also. I do, then, from my soul congratulate you, however pitiable in other respects your condition may be; and, in the name of my Divine Master, I say for your encouragement, “Be not weary in well-doing; for in due season you shall reap, if you faint not.”]

2. Of reproof, to those who are yet strangers to this heavenly experience—

[What have you been doing all your days, that you have never yet made this choice? Are the ways of the world equal in any respect to the way of truth? Are they as reasonable in themselves? Are they as conducive to the best interests of man? or will they prove so happy in their issue? Compare

^a Deut. xxxiii. 29.

the things which tempt you from the testimonies of the Lord, with the loss which they will occasion, and the evils which they will entail upon you. You may now, perhaps, justify the preference which you give to sin: but say whether you will not one day be ashamed of it? Say whether, in that hour when you shall be bidden to depart from your Saviour's presence, and to take your portion for ever in a lake of fire, you will not be ashamed of the choice which you have now so unwisely made, and of the hopes which you now so presumptuously cherish? Peradventure you now laugh at the idea of an enlargement of heart, and deride the course to which it leads: but will you do so in that day? Will you not rather lament that you followed the course of this world, instead of prosecuting the ways which lead to heaven? I would say then to you, "Seek now the Lord whilst he may be found, and call upon him whilst he is near." There is no repentance in the grave, nor any reversing of the sentence that shall soon be passed upon you. Begin, then, the course which David ran, and prosecute it with the ardour that filled his soul. So shall you possess with him the joy that is set before you, and inherit to all eternity the rest that remaineth for the people of God.]

DCC.

WISDOM OF TRUE PIETY.

Ps. cxix. 34. *Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart.*

A SPIRITUAL discernment essentially differs from the mere exercise of our intellectual powers. A man may have the richest stores of human knowledge, and the most discriminating faculty in various branches of science, and yet be under the dominion, the allowed dominion, of his own lusts and passions. But spiritual knowledge is always accompanied with gracious dispositions: and for the sake of its practical effects alone is it to be desired. This appears from what St. Paul says respecting the intercessions which he continually offered before God in the behalf of his Colossian converts: "We do not cease," says he, "to pray for you, and to desire that ye may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; *that ye may walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing*." In a foregoing part of

^a Col. i. 9, 10.

this psalm it might seem, as if knowledge alone had been the end for which David desired a spiritual illumination: "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." But we see in our text, that he had far other ends in view: he longed for knowledge, only that he might have his soul the more enlarged by it to run the way of God's commandments: "Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart."

From these words we will take occasion to shew,

I. How true wisdom will operate—

The provisional engagement which David entered into was no other than what must necessarily result from an answer to his petition. If God give to any of us a spiritual understanding, we shall immediately begin,

1. To keep his law—

[Whatever God has revealed will be a law unto us. Has he bidden us *repent*? We shall humble ourselves before him in dust and ashes — — — Has he enjoined us to *believe* in his dear Son? We shall receive him into our hearts, and embrace him as all our salvation and all our desire — — — Has he commanded us to *obey* his precepts? We shall endeavour to search out his will, and to conform ourselves to it in all things — — — Whatever temptations may assault us, we shall not suffer them to turn us aside from the path of duty. Whatever opposition we may have to encounter, we shall hold on our way, determined to keep God's law, yea, to "keep it to the end^b." This alone is true wisdom^c; yea, this is the first beginning of wisdom in the soul^d.]

2. To observe it with our whole hearts—

[There are two things which a spiritual understanding will most assuredly teach us, namely, the beauty and excellency of God's law, and the folly of rendering to it a merely partial obedience.

To an unenlightened mind many of God's commands appear absurd: and men are ready to say of them, "This is a hard saying; who can hear it?" But, in the view of one who is taught of God, "there is no commandment grievous:" the scope of every thing which God has spoken, is, to produce the present and eternal happiness of his creatures: the language of every injunction is, Be holy, be happy — — — To attempt to lower any command to the standard of man's opinion, or of our

^b ver. 112.

^c Job xxviii. 28.

^d Ps. cxi. 10.

own wishes, is seen to be the most horrible infatuation: for, if we can deceive man, we cannot deceive God: "TO HIM all things are naked and open." As he knows the extent of his own commands, so he knows the precise measure of obedience which we pay to them: "He weighs," not our actions only, but "our spirits" also.

Hence a partial obedience is the same kind of folly as if a man should request permission to take a poisoned cup, because it was sweet; or as if he should shut his eyes, and say, that no man can see him. Convinced of this, he begs of God to "put truth in his inward parts," and desires to be "an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile."]

As from a root which is acknowledged to be good we may anticipate a corresponding produce, so from fruit that is excellent we may infer with certainty the goodness of the root. In proof of this we will proceed to shew,

II. Wherein its operation will approve itself to every reflecting mind—

The observing of God's law with our whole hearts necessarily evinces the existence of true wisdom in the soul; because,

1. It is consonant with right reason—

[What is disobedience, but a preferring of the creature to God, the body to the soul, and time to eternity? And will any one say that *this* is reasonable, or that it has even a shadow of reason in it? Reason requires the very reverse of this: and the yielding up of our soul and body to God, as a living sacrifice, is expressly called "a reasonable service^e." If we consider ourselves only as the work of God's hands, this kind of service is reasonable: but, if we consider ourselves as redeemed by the blood of God's only dear Son, it is infinitely more reasonable: for, "having been bought with a price, we are not our own, but are bound to glorify God with our bodies and our spirits, which are God's."]

2. It is conducive to our best interests—

[We will concede, for argument sake, all that the slaves of pleasure can say in its behalf; yea, we will concede ten times more than its most infatuated votary ever ventured to assert: but, having done this, we will ask, What good will it all do you in a dying hour, and at the bar of judgment? "Godliness," we are told, "is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." But of ungodliness no such thing can be asserted. Granting, that the

^e Rom. xii. 1.

ungodliness may be of the least offensive kind: yea, that it shall be so specious, as to assume the appearance, and to gain from many the applause, of piety; still we ask, What will it avail in the day that God shall judge the world? But it is not true, that the pleasures of sin are so great or so satisfactory. On the contrary, there is no comparison between the peace that flows from piety, and the gratifications that result from any criminal indulgence. "The work of righteousness is peace;" but "the way of transgressors is hard." And, as to the eternal world, there can be no doubt — — — Inasmuch then as piety is most consonant with right reason, and most conducive to our best interests, it approves itself, beyond a possibility of doubt, the genuine offspring of true wisdom.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who live in the allowed violation of any one commandment—

[The world may count you wise: yea, "if you are doing well unto yourselves, (that is, are advancing your own temporal interests,) all men will speak well of you^f." But what does God say of you? "They have forsaken the word of the Lord; and what wisdom is in them^g?" Ah! what indeed? To the rich man, whose heart was elated with his temporal prospects, God said, "Thou fool:" and no better character will he assign to you. Think only with what an eye the heart-searching God beholds you; or what the angels think of your conduct; or what you yourselves will think of it in a little time; and you will be at no loss to form a right estimate of it. If you would be truly wise in God's estimation, your obedience to him must be uniform and unreserved^h.]

2. Those who profess to be endued with true wisdom—

[If "God have given us an understanding," then we must evidence it by the purity of our hearts and lives. But many there are, who can talk very fluently and speciously about religion, who yet are very far from being wise in the sight of God. Hear the judgment of God himself on this subject: "Who is a wise man, and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts (and these are no uncommon inmates with the professors of religion), glory not, and lie not against the truth." (Let proud, conceited, and contentious professors hear this; They are "liars against the truth.") This wisdom descendeth not from above; but is earthly, sensual, devilish. "But the wisdom that is from above, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to

^f Ps. xlix. 18. ^g Jer. viii. 9. ^h Matt. vii. 24—27. Deut. iv. 6.

be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisyⁱ." Here is the test of true wisdom; here is the evidence of a sound understanding. 'The man that is destitute of these gracious tempers, is in darkness even until now: but the man who from love to Christ is enabled to live in the habitual exercise of them, has surely an understanding heart, and is made wise unto salvation.]

ⁱ Jam. iii. 13—17.

DCCI.

THE VANITIES OF THIS WORLD AN OBSTACLE TO SPIRITUAL PROGRESS.

Ps: cxix. 37. *Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way.*

THE depths of the human heart are never more plainly disclosed, than when a man comes into the presence of his Maker. Then he opens all his wants, and supplicates relief for all his necessities. The godly man at a throne of grace knows no dissimulation, no concealment, no false humility. What he speaks, (if he be in a right state) he feels. Let us then draw nigh, and listen to the breathings of holy David. He felt the ensnaring influence of worldly things, and the lamentable tendency of fallen man to relax his efforts in the service of his God: hence he poured out his soul in this humble supplication; "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way."

That we may all be stirred up to implore similar blessings at the hands of God, we propose to shew,

I. The fascinating power of earthly vanities—

By the word "vanity," we understand all those things which are apt to engross the affections of carnal men. The Apostle classes them all under "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life:" and they all justly deserve the name assigned them in the text, because they are sure to disappoint the desires and expectations of all, who look to them for any solid or permanent satisfaction.

These things altogether captivate and enslave the minds of the generality—

[The natural man seeks nothing above them. His mind is not occupied with any thing above them. He “is in the flesh;” he “walks according to the flesh,” “fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind.” His “affections are altogether set upon things below, and not on things above.” His thoughts, his conversation, his labours from day to day, all arise from, and terminate in, the things of time and sense: and from these things alone spring all his hopes and fears, his joys and sorrows — — —]

These things also have great power over those who profess godliness—

[So our Lord has told us in the parable of the Sower. The thorny-ground hearers have made, in appearance at least, a great proficiency in religion. They have far surpassed the stony-ground hearers, who yet have heard the word with joy, and given many cheering and hopeful promises of a future harvest. They have been long established, and brought forth much which both they and others have deemed estimable fruit: but yet, “through the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lust of other things, the seed that has grown up in them is choked, and they bring forth no fruit to perfection.”

Even persons truly and deeply pious are in great danger from them; else why did our blessed Lord caution even his own immediate disciples in those memorable words, “Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares^a.” There is yet an earthly and sensual spirit dwelling in the best of us, and working powerfully to counteract the better dictates of our new man^b: and he knows little of his own heart, who does not see and bewail his own proneness to look back again after the flesh-pots of Egypt.]

But whilst we point out thus the danger of earthly vanities, we would point out also,

II. The way to escape their baneful influence—

We should set a guard upon all our senses—

[The senses are inlets to all manner of evil. Alas! alas! how often has the mind been contaminated by what it has either seen or heard! If it were no more than what we have read in books, or heard in conversation, that was calculated to encourage a worldly spirit, we should all feel abundant reason to lament, that we have not been sufficiently on our guard against the admission of bad impressions on the mind. But the vilest lusts have found an entrance into the heart by these

^a Luke xxi. 34.

^b Gal. v. 17.

avenues. Some have found to their cost, that one sinful idea, which they have either seen in a book or picture, or heard in conversation, has abode with them through life, when they have greatly desired to forget it; whilst hundreds of sermons which they would have been glad to have remembered, have passed from their minds like the early cloud. Behold David, the man after God's own heart; what reason had he to curse the day that he ever looked upon Bathsheba! ——— What reason too had Solomon's fool to lament that ever he listened to the voice of the enchanting adulteress^c! It is not without reason that Solomon advises us not to look upon the wine when sparkling in the glass^d. We must resist the very first entrance of sin into the soul; for it will operate like fire on a house of wood. Alas! "how great a matter does a little fire kindle^e!" Its progress is very rapid: and who shall stop the conflagration, when once it is begun? "When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death^f." We exhort all then, like Solomon, to make a covenant with their eyes, and with their ears also, yea, and with the very imaginations of their heart; that neither their corporeal nor intellectual eyes become ministers of sin, or traitors to their souls.]

We should cry earnestly to God for his effectual grace—

[God does and will preserve his people from evil, if they cry unto him. We should therefore call upon him both for his *preventing* and his *quickening* grace: we should pray, as David, "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way."

There are many ways in which God will turn away our eyes "from beholding vanity." He will, if we are really seeking it at his hands, keep temptation from us. And how much we are all indebted to him for this, we shall never know, till we come to the bar of judgment, and have all his mercies unfolded to our view. Thousands of our fellow-creatures, who were once as respectable in every point of view as ourselves, have in an hour of temptation so fallen, as to destroy all their own honour and happiness through life. And why have not *we* done the same? Are we sure that we, if subjected to the same temptations as they, should not have done the same? Oh! if we are wise, we shall cry day and night, "Lead us not into temptation." But there are many other ways in which God can, and does, impart the same blessing. Perhaps he lays some affliction upon our loins, and visits us with some personal or domestic calamity. We are apt on such occasions to complain of the affliction; whereas, if we saw from what evils the visitation

^c Prov. vii. 6—23.

^d Prov. xxiii. 31, 32.

^e Jam. iii. 5.

^f Jam. i. 15.

was sent to deliver us, we should be adoring God for it as the richest of all mercies. Let our distress be either in body or mind, who will not bless God for it, if it be the means of weakening the influence of worldly objects on his soul, and of keeping his eyes from beholding vanity? — — —

But, in addition to this, we should cry to him also for his quickening grace. However active we may be in the pursuit of earthly things, we all are too sluggish in our heavenly course. Nine times in this psalm does David cry, “Quicken me!” and ninety times nine do we need to renew the petition every day of our lives. Beg of God then to shew you more and more clearly the excellency of “his way” (even of that salvation which Christ has wrought out for us — — —), and the blessedness of the *end* to which it leads. This will quicken us more than any thing else. Let us see the excellency of a *life of faith*; and that will make us despise *the things of sense*. Let us also get *Pisgah views of the land of Canaan*; and we shall value nothing that can be offered us in *this dreary wilderness*. Look at Christ as the way, and Christ as the end; and you will soon “cast away the besetting sins that impede you,” and “run with alacrity the race that is set before you.”^g]

ADDRESS—

1. Young people—

[Greatly do you need to offer the petition in our text. O! bear in mind what is *the true character of earthly things*: they are “*vanity*” altogether — — — Bear in mind *your danger from them*: they will ensnare, and, if the snare be not broken, destroy, your souls — — — Bear in mind *your need of divine grace to counteract their influence*. It is God only that can preserve you: and, if not preserved by him, you will fall and perish — — —]

2. Those who make a profession of godliness—

[Think not that you are above temptation. Satan tempted even our blessed Lord himself, by “shewing him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them.” And you will he tempt in like manner. Nor imagine that you may not fall: for Demas was as eminent as any of you, and yet fell at last, through love of this present world^h. In every Church the sad effect of worldly and carnal lusts is seen. You yourselves see it in others. O, beware lest it be seen in you also. It is your duty, and your happiness, to “be crucified unto the world, and to have the world crucified unto youⁱ.” You may use this world, if God have given it to you; but you must “so use it, as not to abuse it;^k” and so flee from all occasions of evil, that you may be “found of God at last without spot, and blameless^l.”]

^g Heb. xii. 1, 2. ^h 2 Tim. iv. 10. with Col. iv. 14. and Phil. 24.

ⁱ Gal. vi. 14.

^k 1 Cor. vii. 29—31.

^l 2 Pet. iii. 14.

DCCII.

TRUE LIBERTY.

Ps. cxix. 45. *I will walk at liberty; for I seek thy precepts.*

JUSTLY as civil liberty is appreciated amongst us, there are but few who have just conceptions of that liberty which has respect to morality and religion. Every one knows that unrestrained liberty is licentiousness: but every one does not know, that a perfect obedience to God's Holy Word is the most perfect liberty that man can enjoy. This, however, is plainly intimated in the passage before us; from whence I shall take occasion to shew,

I. That the ungodly are strangers to true liberty—

They will boast of liberty, and “promise it to all who will conform to their ways; but they are altogether in a state of bondage^a.”

1. To the world—

[The tastes of men differ, according to their age and to the sphere in which they move: but all of every age and every rank are subject to the laws of custom, which they dare not to infringe. Even the religion of men must be conformed to this standard; and God's commandments must be reduced to the scale which men have established for the regulation of their own lives. If one be told what God requires, he immediately bethinks himself, ‘What will this person say, or that person do, if I comply with requisitions so foreign to the habits of those around me? Will they not deride my singularity, and set themselves to oppose my insufferable preciseness?’ To justify their conduct, men put the Scriptures altogether aside, as an antiquated volume, the dictates of which are superseded by the wiser and more practicable maxims of fashion and “philosophy, falsely so called.” Yes: of all unconverted men it is declared, that they “walk according to the course of this world^b,” and “gaze strangely at any who presume to choose for themselves a holier path^c.”]

2. To the flesh—

[There are different degrees in which men yield to the impulse of their corrupt appetites: but every man has “a law in his members warring against the law of his mind, and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin which is in his

^a 2 Pet. ii. 19.

^b Eph. ii. 2.

^c 1 Pet. iv. 4.

members^d." In fact, there is not any one so ignorant, but that even his unenlightened reason prescribes to him a better path than he pursues. Let us look around, and see what are the dispositions and habits of all around us. Are not all "fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind^e," without affecting any thing higher than the gratification of their own corrupt appetites? We are told, that "they who are after the flesh, do mind the things of the flesh^f:" and we know, from infallible authority, that to whomsoever we yield ourselves servants to obey, his servants we are to whom we obey^g." In truth, even to our dying hour will our conflicts with this tyrannical master continue; for even St. Paul himself complained, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death^h?"]

3. To the Devil—

[Well is Satan called "the god of this world: for he worketh in all the children of disobedienceⁱ." Ever since he prevailed over our first parents in Paradise, he has subjected the whole race of man to his dominion, "taking them in his snares, and leading them captive at his will^k." That men deny the agency, and even the existence of this great adversary, is only a proof to what an extent they are "blinded by him^l," and how effectually he has lulled them to sleep in his very arms^m. Doubtless it is very humiliating to think of ourselves as his vassals: but this is the true state of every unconverted man; and even the saints themselves are not delivered from his influence, but through the mighty power of Jehovah himself, given in answer to fervent and believing prayerⁿ.]

But the Psalmist's mention of liberty leads us more particularly to shew,

II. What sweet enjoyments they have of it who love and serve their God—

David accounted the service of his God to be perfect freedom. And so, indeed, it is: for the man whom "the truth of the Gospel has made free^o," and who "looks to God's precepts" as his only rule of conduct, he, I say, walks,

1. According to the dictates of his own judgment—

[He has an insight into the mind and will of God, and clearly discerns that there is not, in all the Holy Scriptures,

^d Rom. vii. 23.

^e Eph. ii. 3.

^f Rom. viii. 5.

^g Rom. vi. 16.

^h Rom. vii. 24.

ⁱ Eph. ii. 2.

^k 2 Tim. ii. 26.

^l 2 Cor. iv. 4.

^m Luke xi. 21.

ⁿ Eph. vi. 12—18. Jam. iv. 7. Rom. xvi. 20.

^o John viii. 32.

a command which does not conduce to the happiness of all who obey it. His own mind and conscience go along with the word of God, and set their seal to the truth and excellency of every thing contained in it. "Not one commandment appears to him to be grievous^p:" the whole law of God is esteemed by him as "holy, and just, and good^q." To "love God with all his heart and soul and strength, and his neighbour as himself," does not appear to him any hardship imposed upon him, but the perfection of his nature and completion of his felicity: so that he would on no account have one atom of this law cancelled, or mitigated in the least degree. His own judgment tells him that it is no less his privilege, than it is his duty, to be "holy, as God is holy;" and "perfect, as his Father who is in heaven is perfect."]

2. Agreeably to the inclination of his own will—

[He is neither drawn nor driven against his own will. He is, indeed, "made willing in the day of God's power^r;" but "he is drawn with the cords of a man, and with the bands of love^s." He does not, indeed, all that he would; yea, in too many respects he does what he would not^t:" but this very thing shews that it is rather strength than inclination that he wants^u. Could he have but the desire of his heart, he would leave no sin unmortified, no duty unfulfilled. He is in the situation of one who is running a race, or "fighting a fight:" had he but his will accomplished, his every antagonist would be vanquished in a moment, and "death itself, his last enemy, be swallowed up in victory."]

3. In an unbiassed exercise of his own affections—

[He has a real delight in God. He does not observe the duties of prayer and praise through the fear of hell, but from a real pleasure which he feels in drawing nigh to God, whom it is his privilege to call by the endearing name of Father, and in communion with whom he would gladly walk all the day long. Conceive of Adam before his fall; and there you have an image of those who, through the tender mercy of God, are restored. True, they still have "the flesh lusting against the Spirit, as well as the Spirit lusting against the flesh; so that they neither do, nor can do, all that they would^x:" but their *taste* is the very same with that of angels; and the felicity of angels is begun in them: for their life, so far as they have really attained, is both a preparation for heaven, and a foretaste also of heaven, in their souls.]

^p 1 John v. 3.

^q Rom. vii. 12. and Ps. cxix. 128.

^r Ps. cx. 3.

^s Hos. xi. 4.

^t Rom. vii. 15.

^u Rom. vii. 16—20. ^x Gal. v. 17.

Let me then, in CONCLUSION, commend this liberty to your acceptance—

[Think not, my Brethren, that the Gospel is a mere system of restraints: no, it is a “perfect law of liberty^y,” and “all who are made free by Christ, are become free indeed^z.” O that religion were but understood in this view! No captive would more delight to shake off his chains, than sinners would to emancipate themselves from the sore bondage in which they are held. Know then, Brethren, that I am authorised, in the name of Jesus Christ, to “preach deliverance to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bruised^a.” The jubilee trumpet now sounds in your ears, and proclaims to you a restoration to all that you have ever lost and forfeited. Did not the poor slave, think you, when called to resume his liberty and his inheritance, account the trumpet a joyful sound? Let the Gospel, then, be such a sound to you: and, instead of regarding God’s service as a hard bondage, adopt the language of the Psalmist: “I will walk at liberty; for I seek thy precepts.” “Take upon you the yoke of Christ, and I pledge myself that you shall find it light and easy; and you shall obtain everlasting rest unto your souls^b.”]

^y James i. 25.

^z John viii. 36.

^a Luke iv. 18, 19.

^b Matt. xi. 28, 29.

DCCIII.

COMFORT UNDER PERSECUTION.

Ps. cxix. 51, 52. *The proud have had me greatly in derision; yet have I not declined from thy Law. I remembered thy judgments of old, O Lord; and have comforted myself.*

THERE is not, throughout the whole Scriptures, any woe so little feared, so little thought of, so little credited, as that which was denounced by our blessed Lord, “Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you^a!” But, in truth, there is no denunciation more certain to be executed than that: for there is nothing that can more infallibly prove us to be the enemies of God, than the approbation and love of an ungodly world. If it be asked, Whence this should be? I answer, that “the things which are highly esteemed amongst men are an abomination in the sight of God; and that the things which are pleasing to God are no less an abomination in the sight of

^a Luke vi. 26.

men: and consequently, that, whichever of the two we serve, we must of necessity lose the favour of the other. This is what our blessed Lord has told us: "Ye cannot serve God and mammon;" ye cannot adhere to either without despising and renouncing the other^b. And the truth of this has been exemplified in all the saints, from the time of Abel to the present moment. What David speaks respecting his own experience of it, will lead me to consider,

I. The trials he endured—

He was held greatly in derision by his ungodly subjects—

[If any one could have escaped contempt, we should have supposed that David would be the happy man. His rank in society, as the king of Israel; his extraordinary prowess in arms; the services he had rendered to his country; and the marvellous sublimity of his piety, must, we should have thought, have rendered him an object of universal love and admiration. But, amongst his proud and envious subjects, this last quality neutralized, as it were, all his merits, and reduced him to an object of hatred and contempt. The highest people in his kingdom delighted to speak against him^c; whilst the lowest readily joined in their opprobrious treatment of him^d. The fat bulls of Bashan on the one hand, and the dogs on the other, compassed him about^e, and treated him with every species of indignity. Even his own wife, who should have been ready to stem the torrent of abuse that was cast upon him, herself joined in it with peculiar malignity^f; and the very best actions of his life were made the chief subjects of their profane raillery^g. And let not this be thought a light affliction. Truly it is painful to flesh and blood to bear such contemptuous treatment: so, at least, the Apostle represents it in the Epistle to the Hebrews^h; and so David himself found it to be: "Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy upon us!" says he: "for we are exceedingly filled with contempt: our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorning of those that are at ease, and with the contempt of the proudⁱ."]]

And can we hope to escape a similar trial?

[Look at the saints from the beginning, and find one that ever escaped it? How contemptuously did the scoffers of the antediluvian world ridicule the conduct of Noah, all the time

^b Matt. vi. 24.

^c ver. 23.

^d Ps. lxxix. 12.

^e Ps. xxii. 12, 16.

^f 2 Sam. vi. 20.

^g 2 Sam. vi. 16. and Ps. lxxix. 10—12.

^h Heb. x. 32, 33.

ⁱ Ps. cxxiii. 3, 4.

that he was preparing the ark^k! What an object of derision, too, was Isaac, on account of his confidence in God^l! Behold Lot also in Sodom^m, and Elishaⁿ and Jeremiah^o in Israel: or rather, look at our blessed Lord himself, and all his holy Apostles; what was there too contemptuous for the ungodly to say either of him^p or them^q? — — How, then, can any one hope to escape in the present day? Is “the carnal mind less at enmity with God” now, than in former ages? That the laws of the land protect the godly to a certain degree, is true; but from the shafts of calumny and contempt, no laws, whether divine or human, can protect us: and this species of persecution, at least, shall every one experience, who will come out from the world, and boldly declare himself to be on the side of Christ^r. “If they called the Master of the house Beelzebub, much more will they those of his household^s.”]

For our direction, then, let us contemplate,

II. The graces he exercised—

Whilst he bore his trials with patience, he suffered none of them to divert him from the path of duty—

[David’s mind was too firmly fixed on God to be moved by the scoffs and raillery of a profane world. What he did, he did from principle. He regarded God’s Law as a rule from which no trial whatever should induce him to depart. Not only would he not turn *back* from the path of duty; he would not turn *aside* from it, no, not for a moment. The more contemptuously he was treated by men, the more diligently he sought communion with his God, in the study of his blessed word^t, and in the exercise of fervent prayer^u. Hence, when he and his people were treated with the utmost possible scorn and derision, he could appeal to God in the following triumphant language: “All this is come upon us; yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant: our heart is not turned back; neither have our steps declined from thy ways^x.”]

And such, also, is the firmness which we should manifest—

[It should be with us “a small matter to be judged of man’s judgment^y.” We should have but one object, and that is, to approve ourselves to God; and, having “the testimony of our consciences that we have pleased him,” we should not

^k 2 Pet. iii. 3—6.

^l Gen. xxi. 6. with Gal. iv. 29.

^m 2 Pet. ii. 7, 8.

ⁿ 2 Kings ii. 23.

^o Jer. xx. 7.

^p Matt. xxvii. 39—44.

^q 1 Cor. iv. 13.

^r John xv. 19.

^s Matt. x. 25.

^t ver. 23, 24.

^u Ps. lxix. 13.

^x Ps. xlv. 13—18. with lxix. 20.

^y 1 Cor. iv. 3.

lay to heart the displeasure of others, however contemptuously or virulently it may be displayed. Onward we should go in our destined path, not turning either to the right hand or to the left. If the whole world should deride us, we should not be induced either to do any thing which will offend our God, or to forbear any thing which will honour him. That they "hate our light," and are offended at it, is no reason at all why we should "put it under a bushel:" whoever they may be, whether friends or foes, our reply to them should be, "I will yet be more vile than thus^z."

Nor will this be very difficult, when once we have tasted of,

III. The consolations he enjoyed—

In the recollection of "God's judgments of old, he comforted himself"—

[The term "judgments" has in the Scriptures a great variety of meanings. In the psalm before us it seems to import the declarations and decisions of Jehovah. Now God, in his word, has abundantly declared that such treatment is to be expected, and that it is, to those who suffer it, a token for good: "The just upright man is laughed to scorn. He that is ready to slip with his feet, is as a lamp despised in the thought of him that is at ease^a." A lamp burning bright in a dark place is an object of high regard; but when it is so burnt down that the flame is quivering on the wick, and almost extinct, it is regarded rather as an object of disgust. And such is the light in which even the best of worldly men are viewed, when once God is pleased to convert them to himself: they are no longer welcomed as friends to exhilarate and enliven their companions, but are lothed rather, as the bane of social happiness. In God's estimation, however, they are proportionably exalted; and are taught to consider "the reproach of Christ as greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt^b." In the view of these things, the Psalmist "comforted himself;" saying, "Let thy tender mercies come unto me, that I may live: for thy Law is my delight. Let the proud be ashamed; for they dealt perversely with me without a cause: but I will meditate in thy precepts^c."]

The same sources of comfort are ever open unto us also—

[Our blessed Lord speaks of this treatment as the certain portion of all his people: "Ye shall be hated of all men, for my name's sake^d." And does he represent this as a matter for grief and sorrow? Far from it: he tells us rather to

^z 2 Sam. vi. 22.

^a Job xii. 4, 5.

^b Heb. xi. 26.

^c ver. 77, 78.

^d Matt. x. 22.

“rejoice and leap for joy, because great will be our reward in heaven^e.” Besides, in these afflictions we are made “partakers of Christ’s sufferings;” and by means of them “the Spirit of glory and of God is made more visibly and more abundantly to rest upon us:” and though, “on the part of our enemies, God is evil spoken of and dishonoured, on our part he is glorified^f,” and, to crown the whole, we are assured, that, “if we suffer thus with Christ, we shall also in due time be glorified together^g.” And are not these declarations abundantly sufficient to comfort us, under all that we can be called to suffer for Christ’s sake? No doubt they are: and, therefore, if we participate with David in his trials and his graces, we shall, both in this life and the next, be partakers also of his consolations.]

LEARN, then, from this subject,

1. What expectations to form—

[You must not dream of honour from man; but be contented with the honour that cometh of God^h— — — You must expect to go through “honour and dishonour, through evil report as well as good reportⁱ.”]

2. What conduct to pursue—

[Be not cast down when these trials come upon you; but submit to them, as sent of God for your good; and “rejoice that you are counted worthy to endure them for the Lord’s sake^k” — — —]

3. What recompence to look for—

[Be not anxious about the approbation of men, if only you may but approve yourselves to God. In a little time you will stand at his judgment-seat; and then you shall receive a testimony from him, and “your righteousness shall appear as the noon-day.” If “the Lord Jesus do but confess you before his Father and his holy angels,” it will be no grief to you that you have suffered for confessing him^l. A crown of righteousness and glory will be an ample recompence for all the hatred and contempt that an ungodly world could pour upon you.]

^e Matt. v. 10—12.

^f 1 Pet. iv. 13, 14.

^g Rom. viii. 17.

^h John v. 44.

ⁱ 2 Cor. vi. 8.

^k Acts v. 41^l.

^l Matt. x. 32.

DCCIV.

SERIOUS AND SPEEDY CONVERSION TO GOD RECOMMENDED.

Ps. cxix. 59, 60. *I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies. I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.*

AT what period of David's life these words were written, we are not informed: if in his early youth, they relate to his first conversion to God; but if in his middle or more advanced life, they declare the daily habit of his soul. Under any circumstances they are very instructive. To young people they shew, that it is never too early to begin a life of entire devotedness to God. To those engaged in business of any kind, they manifest, that, whilst *in* the world, they should not be *of* the world, but in the midst of all their cares they should preserve their minds spiritual and heavenly. To the great and noble, yea, to princes and kings, they hold forth a solemn admonition to imitate the Jewish monarch, and to be as eminent in piety, as they are elevated above others in state and dignity. This *all* may learn from them, that if ever we would find acceptance with God in the great day, we must turn to him,

I. With care and diligence—

Inconsideration is the source of almost all the evil that exists—

[Men will not give themselves the trouble to look back upon their past conduct. They take for granted that all has been right, or at least not materially wrong; and that they have done nothing that calls for any particular humiliation before God. Of this the prophet Jeremiah complains^a; as does our Lord also of the Jews in his day^b. Nor will men take much pains to ascertain the path of duty in reference to what is future: they love rather to act from the impulse of the moment; nor have they any apprehensions that they shall offend God by any thing that they may do. "They do what is right in their own eyes," without inquiring whether it be right in God's sight, or not; or whether HE remembers it, or not^c.]

But we should compare our actions carefully with the word of God—

[The sacred volume is the only adequate standard of truth and virtue. If we satisfy ourselves with the opinions of men and the customs of the world, we shall be sure to err. We should take "God's testimonies," and try our ways by them. In particular, we should notice what God has testified to us in his gospel; and see whether in our spirit and conduct we are

^a Jer. viii. 6.

^b John iii. 19, 20.

^c Hos. vii. 2.

such as he requires us to be. In this lies the vast difference between the standard of the world and that of God: the world regards nothing but our outward conduct, and *that* chiefly in reference to the welfare of society; whereas God has respect to all our dispositions towards him and his Christ, and to all our motives and principles of action towards men. We should take the scripture then as our touchstone; and see how far the whole habit of our minds accords with what is required of us there, and what we see exemplified in the primitive saints — — — Yea, we should set Christ himself before us, and try ourselves by the standard of his perfection — — —]

And, having ascertained what God's word requires, we should rectify our lives according to it—

[We must “turn,” not our thoughts only, but “our feet” also, unto his testimonies. Having found out our past errors, we should humble ourselves for them, and determine, through grace, to run into them no more: and having discovered “the good old way,” we should strive, through grace, to “walk in it.” As for obstacles of any kind, we should not regard them. We should have it settled in our minds, that “the high-way of holiness” is the only road that will lead to heaven; and we should resolve, that, however narrow and unfrequented it may be, we will walk in it, even though earth and hell should conspire to obstruct our progress^d— — — This is the advice given us by the voice of inspiration^e: and to follow it is the duty, the interest, the happiness, of every human being^f.]

In this however there should be no delay: we should all address ourselves to this work,

II. With promptitude and decision—

Next to utter thoughtlessness is the evil of procrastination—

[There are none so blind as not to know that they have *some* occasion for repentance, or so *hardened* as to have formed a determined resolution that they will never repent. All have a faint purpose in their minds, that at some future period they will repent: but then they put it off at present, in expectation of some “more convenient season.” The young think that they have time enough before them, and that any great attention to religion is unsuited to their age. The busy are so engaged in their several concerns, that they think they may well be excused attending to religion, till a time of greater leisure. Every one finds some excuse for himself, and puts off the evil day, in hopes that some period will arrive when he shall be better disposed to the great work of turning unto God — — —]

^d Matt. vii. 13, 14. ^e Lam. iii. 40. ^f Eccl. xii. 13. Luke x. 42.

But it is folly and madness to defer this important work—

[*It must be done*; or else we inevitably and eternally perish — — — *No man can call an hour his own.* “We know not what a day, an hour, a moment, may bring forth:” whilst we are looking for days and years to come, God may say, “Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee.” *The difficulty of the work increases daily.* The force of habit is exceeding great: and the longer we fulfil the desires of the flesh and of the mind, the more difficult it will be to mortify and subdue them — — — *We are in danger also of provoking God to withdraw from us all the assistances of his Spirit.* We may “grieve the Holy Spirit,” yea, may “quench” also his sacred motions. God has said, “My Spirit shall not alway strive with man:” and if once he say respecting us, “Let them alone,” our doom is sealed as surely as if we were already gone beyond redemption. *And how awful is the state of those who are taken unprepared!* What “weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth” will they experience, cursing their own folly, and vainly wishing it were possible for them to have another opportunity afforded them for working out their salvation^g!

Say then whether any man should defer one hour this necessary work! surely we should “make haste, and not delay, to keep God’s commandments^h.”]

That in this great work you may not miscarry, we would subjoin some useful ADVICE—

Cry mightily to God — — —, and seek of him,

1. Impartiality in judging—

[Self-love always prompts us to form a favourable estimate of our own conduct. If we search at all, we search rather for excuses than for sins; for grounds of self-approbation, rather than of self-reproach. But what folly is this! God will form his estimate aright, whether we do or not; and by his own estimate he will judge us in the last day. Professors of religion, no less than others, are warped by self-love; and thousands there are whose spirit and conduct are directly at variance with the Gospel, whilst yet they boast of themselves as lights in a dark world — — — O search your hearts, as the Jews searched their houses for leaven, or as you would search a room for jewels which you had lost. You would not hastily shut your eyes, and say, There is no jewel here; but you would be examining every corner, to find as many as possibly you could; not content to leave so much as one undiscovered. If such impartiality were once exercised by us in detecting our sins, we should not be far from the kingdom of God.]

^g Eccl. ix. 10.

^h See Heb. iii. 7—14.

2. Fidelity in acting—

[Were a traveller, after long and laborious search, to find the true way to the place whither he was journeying, he would retrace his steps, and proceed in the path which led to the place of his destination. It might be less pleasant than his former path; but still he would walk in it. Say not then that a life of entire devotedness to God is difficult, or that the ways of Christ and his Apostles would make you singular, or require sacrifices on your part. Be it so: but still you must go forward: you must “not confer with flesh and blood:” you must give yourselves up, in body, soul, and spirit, to the Lord. You must strive to “walk altogether as Christ walked,” and to “stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.”]

3. Firmness in persevering—

[It is comparatively easy to *begin* well: the difficulty lies in *persevering*. The fear of death, or some strong impression on our minds, will operate for a time; but, if there be not a root of grace in us, we shall soon turn back to our evil ways. And, if we do that, we make our state really worse than it was before we thought of our ways at allⁱ. O “be not weary in well doing.” Make up your mind to encounter difficulties, and to endure hardships: and know that the *end* will richly repay for all the difficulties of the *way*.]

ⁱ 2 Pet. ii. 21.

DCCV.

THE GOODNESS OF GOD.

Ps. cxix. 68. *Thou art good, and doest good: teach me thy statutes.*

THE perfections of God, if considered only in a speculative view, must excite our admiration; but, if contemplated in reference to our state and conduct, they will be to us a source of unspeakable comfort, and a spring of incessant activity. What emotions a knowledge of the Divine goodness will produce in the soul, we see in the words before us; in discoursing upon which we shall notice,

I. The goodness of God—

In conformity with the text, we shall call your attention to,

1. His essential goodness—

[This is not an indiscriminate regard to all, whether they be good or evil; for such a regard would not consist with justice, or holiness, or truth: but it is a general benevolence towards the whole creation, operating incessantly for the good of the whole. The manner in which it discovers itself is as various as the states of men: but, however diversified its operations may be, it is the same principle in God. It is the sum of all his perfections: towards the undeserving it is *grace*; and to the ill-deserving, *mercy*: to the indigent it is *bounty*; to the distressed, *pity and compassion*: towards the impenitent it is *forbearance*; and to the obstinate and incorrigible it is *justice*. This is the view which God himself gives us of his goodness^a; and, in this view, it resides in him necessarily, in him only, and in him continually.]

2. His communicative goodness—

[This he manifests *to the world at large*. When first he created the world, he formed every thing “very good.” And if we look around us, we shall be constrained to say, “The earth is full of his goodness.”

Towards man in particular, his goodness is more abundantly displayed. Towards the ungodly he has shewn it, by giving his only dear Son to die for them, and his good Spirit to instruct them: yea, he has set apart an order of men also to entreat them in his name to accept the proffered salvation. Towards the godly he has abounded yet still more in the exceeding riches of his grace: for, in addition to all that he has done for the ungodly, he has made his word effectual for their conversion; and he watches over them with paternal care, supplying all their wants, and protecting them in all their dangers; and, to complete the whole, he will crown them finally with his glory^b.]

Such a view of God as this cannot but lead us to adopt,

II. The petition grounded upon it—

The petition itself is such as all ought to offer for themselves—

[By “the statutes” of God we understand both the truths he has revealed, and the precepts he has enjoined. Of these we are by nature ignorant; nor can we by mere human exertions ever acquire a right understanding of them^c. We must be taught of God: our eyes must be opened by his Spirit:

^a Moses prays for a sight of God’s *glory*; God promises to shew him his *goodness*; and then represents it as consisting in an united exercise of all his perfections. Exod. xxxiii. 18, 19. and xxxiv. 6, 7.

^b Ps. ciii. 1—5.

^c 1 Cor. ii. 14.

then only shall we keep his statutes, when God himself shall “write them on the fleshy tables of our hearts.”]

But the petition has peculiar force as grounded on a discovery of God’s goodness; for, in *that*, as in a glass, we SEE,

1. Our duties—

[The law of God primarily declares our duty towards him: but none ever attain a just knowledge of that duty from the law alone: they cannot see the necessity of loving God with all their hearts, till they have some idea of the obligations they lie under to him for the stupendous work of redemption. But let the love of God in Christ Jesus be once clearly revealed to the soul, and the excellency of the law will instantly appear; and obedience to it will be considered as perfect freedom.]

2. Our defects—

[We are naturally averse to acknowledge our vileness and wickedness. But a sight of the Divine goodness softens the mind, and renders it ingenuous. Hence the more we are acquainted with God, the more we know of ourselves; and the more we have experienced of his love, the more we “abhor ourselves for our ingratitude to him, and our want of conformity to his image^d.”]

3. Our encouragements—

[Wherever we look, we have no encouragement but in God. Indeed, if only we be acquainted with his goodness, we want no other encouragement: for, what will not He do, who is so good in himself? and what will He refuse us, who has done so much for us already^e? Such considerations as these are sufficient to counterbalance every difficulty that the world, or the flesh, or the devil can place in our way. Having this God for our God, we can want nothing for time or for eternity.]

^d Job xlii. 5, 6. Ezek. xvi. 63.

^e Rom. viii. 32.

DCCVI.

THE BENEFIT OF AFFLICTION.

Ps. cxix. 71. *It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.*

DAVID had “been afflicted from his youth up” — — — and we think it highly probable that to that very circumstance he was indebted, under God, for those extraordinary attainments in devotion and holiness, which have rendered him a pattern for the

saints in all future ages. By means of his trials he was constrained to take refuge in his God: and by constant communion with God, he obtained a deep insight into his revealed will, and a rich experience of his superabounding grace. This seems at least to have been his own view of the case, long after his afflictions had ceased: for to his familiarity with affliction he ascribes his enlarged acquaintance with the statutes of his God: "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes."

In confirmation of his testimony, we shall shew,

I. The benefit of affliction, as leading to knowledge—

Affliction, in itself considered, is an evil: but, if viewed in connexion with the benefits resulting from it, it may justly be esteemed "a good." Thousands there are who have reason to bless God for it, as instrumental to the bringing of them to the knowledge of a Saviour, whom, without such trials, they would have continued to neglect. Indeed it is eminently and extensively useful in this view:

1. It opens our ears to instruction—

[People who are at ease, however eager they may be after human knowledge, have no desire after that which is spiritual and divine. If it be tendered to them, they reject it: if it be pressed upon them, they cast it behind their backs with indignation and scorn. To one who would instruct them in arts or sciences, they would feel thankful: but to one who would lead them to the knowledge of the true God, they make no return, but that of contempt and hatred^a.

But when heavy affliction is come upon them, they are softened: they will listen to advice; they will even be thankful for it: they will read the Scriptures, or some other religious book: and will pay considerable attention to those subjects which hitherto have provoked only their derision.

With this view, and for the production of this very effect, God frequently vouchsafes to send it^b: and those who are brought by it to this measure of thoughtfulness about their souls, have reason rather to be thankful for it as a benefit, than to complain of it as a judgment.]

2. It makes us sensible of our need of better things than this world can give—

^a John iii. 19. Matt. vii. 26.

^b Job xxxvi. 8—10.

[In the midst of carnal enjoyments a man wishes for nothing more: but when trials of various kinds oppress his mind, his taste for earthly gratifications is weakened: their insufficiency to remove, or even to alleviate, trouble is felt; and they no longer afford him that kind of satisfaction which they once did. Amusements, and company, have lost their relish: his mind is indisposed for them: they are become to him insipid, undesirable, irksome, odious. Something more substantial is now wanted: something on which his soul may rest, as conducive to its present and eternal welfare. This was the effect produced upon the Prodigal. Whilst he could revel in luxury and pleasure, he cared for nothing; but when his money was expended, and he was a prey to want, and could find no help, no pity, from man, then he began to reflect on the abundance that there was in his Father's house, and to desire a participation of it, though in the lowest and most menial office there. And had he not reason to be thankful for the trials which produced so blessed an effect? In like manner then we also should acknowledge as a blessing every trial that is sent us for the accomplishment of so good an end.]

3. It drives us to God in prayer—

[Those who never called upon God in the time of their prosperity, are often stirred up to seek him in a season of adversity. "In their affliction," says God, "they will seek me early^c:" and to the same effect the Prophet testifies, "Lord, in trouble have they visited thee; they poured forth a prayer when thy chastening was upon them^d." In the 107th Psalm this effect of troubles is marked in *every* instance: "Then cried they unto the Lord in their trouble^e:" and in *every* instance this was the prelude to their deliverance. Who then that experiences this effect from his trials has not reason to be thankful for them? Let it only be said of us, "Behold, he prayeth;" and we shall have no cause for complaint, though we should have been struck blind, like Saul, and had our blindness continued to the latest hour of our lives^f.]

4. It brings us to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus—

[Of itself, affliction cannot effect this; but when accompanied by Divine grace, it often does. Indeed where a willingness to receive instruction, and a desire after spiritual blessings are excited in the soul, and issue in fervent prayer to God, there we may reasonably hope that all spiritual blessings will flow into the soul. God will not suffer any to seek his face in vain. Even though, like Manassah, we may have brought down

^c Hos. v. 15.

^d Isai. xxvi. 16.

^e ver. 6, 13, 19, 28.

^f Acts ix. 3, 4, 8.

God's wrath upon us by the most heinous iniquities, yet if we humble ourselves under his chastisements, and implore mercy at his hands, we shall, like him, be heard, and be made stupendous monuments of his power and grace^s. Did *he* ever regret the sufferings by which he was thus brought to enjoy peace with God? Neither shall *we*, whatever trials may be made subservient to this blessed end.]

But will the end really compensate for the means used to effect it? Yes: and to prove that it will, we shall proceed to shew,

II. The blessedness of knowledge, though gained by affliction—

Such knowledge as we are speaking of, the knowledge of God in Christ Jesus, is indeed inestimable. Let us view it,

1. As compared with the price paid for it—

[It is said by Solomon, "Buy the truth, and sell it not." Now as we have before spoken of affliction as the means of bringing us to the knowledge of the truth, we may, in popular language, call it, The price paid for knowledge. Whatever then the affliction be, we do not hesitate to say that it is richly recompensed by the fruit which it produces.

Suppose the affliction to be of a *temporal nature*: we have been bereaved of our dearest friends and relatives; we have suffered the loss of all our property, and been reduced to very embarrassed circumstances; our health also has been destroyed, so that we are sinking under an accumulation of woes. Suppose our case as distressing as that of Job himself: still, if it have been sanctified to our eternal good, we can call it by no other name than, A blessing in disguise. Did Job, when brought to a deeper view of his own depravity, and to a richer discovery of the Divine perfections, regret the sufferings which had been overruled for that end? Did he not rather abhor himself for having judged too hastily respecting the designs of God; and cordially approve of those dispensations, which in his haste he had been ready to condemn? Thus shall we also do, when once we have "seen the *end* of the Lord^h." We may in our haste exclaim, "All these things are against me:" but at last we shall testify of all God's most afflictive dispensations, as Joseph did, that "God meant them for goodⁱ."

But suppose the trials to be of a *spiritual nature*. These are yet far more afflictive: "A wounded spirit who can bear?" How grievously David was oppressed by them, we are informed

^s 2 Chron. xxxiii. 11--13

^h Jam. v. 11.

ⁱ Gen. 1. 20.

in many of his psalms^k — — — But yet his testimony in our text was the real dictate of his heart. And we may ask of others, Were the wounds which brought you to the heavenly Physician too severe? Do you not number them amongst your richest mercies? Has not every loss been more than compensated in the acquisition of salvation; and every pang more than recompensed in the peace and joy to which, through the knowledge of Christ, you have attained? It was a matter of just computation with the Apostle, that “the sufferings of this present life (whatever they may be) are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.”]

2. As estimated according to its own intrinsic worth—

[But who can ever rightly appreciate its worth? St. Paul “counted all things to be but dross and dung in comparison of it^l.” We must be able to estimate all the miseries of hell, and all the glories of heaven, before we can form any estimate of its value; and, if we could ascertain the full importance of those, we should still be as far as ever from having a complete conception of the worth of spiritual knowledge; unless we could estimate also all the glory that will accrue to the ever blessed Trinity from the contrivance and execution of this stupendous plan, and the application of this salvation to a ruined world.]

ADDRESS—

1. To those that are at ease—

[How faint, for the most part, are your desires after spiritual knowledge! Whether you hear, or read, or pray, what formality pervades it all! But, if God have indeed designs of love towards you, you will be taught by the rod, what you will not learn without: “He will cause you to pass under the rod, in order that he may bring you into the bond of the covenant.” And if lesser trials will not accomplish the purposes of his grace, he will visit you with heavier: “from chastening you with rods he will scourge you with scorpions.” Yet think not that a season of affliction is *in itself* favourable for the pursuit of spiritual knowledge: it is far otherwise: pains of body, and distress of mind, have a tendency to impede, rather than assist, the exercises of the mind. Ask those who are in deep affliction, Whether they find it easy to collect their thoughts, and fix them with energy on the concerns of their souls; and they will bear one uniform testimony, that health is the time to seek the Lord. Be persuaded then, now whilst you are at ease, to study “God’s statutes,” and especially those which declare to us the way of salvation ordained for sinful

^k See Ps. xxxviii. 1—8. and lxxvii. 3—9. and lxxxviii. 6, 7. and cii. 1—10.

^l Phil. iii. 8.

man. Know that there is no other knowledge of any importance whatever in comparison of this; and that, if even the most grievous sufferings should be welcomed as necessary to the attainment of it, much more must it deserve all the time and attention that can be bestowed upon it. You never need fear that you will hereafter have occasion to complain, that its fruits did not repay you for the cultivation of it.]

2. To those that are under any great affliction—

[The rod under which you suffer, has a voice, to which you should listen with all possible attention^m. It is sent to you in love and mercy. God designs to teach you, by means of it, many things which you would not so well learn without it. It may be that you are already instructed in the Gospel of Christ; but yet there is much of which you are ignorant; and many things which you do know, need to be known by you in a very different manner. Even our blessed Lord himself, “though he was a Son, learned obedience by the things which he suffered,” yea, and “was made perfect through sufferings.” Be content to have God’s work carried on and perfected in you in the same way: and be more anxious to obtain the benefit which your affliction is sent to impart, than to get rid of the affliction itself. If your tribulation work in you patience and experience and hope, learn to glory in it, and to number it amongst your richest blessings. And do not wait till the affliction is removed, to acknowledge God’s goodness to you in sending it; but *now*, whilst you are under the affliction, get it so improved and sanctified to the good of your soul, that you may be able to say, “It is good for me, O Lord, that I *am* afflicted; for by means of it I *do* learn thy statutes:” I see, “it is in very faithfulness that thou afflictest me;” and, if only thou “make me a partaker of thy holiness, send me *what* thou wilt, and *when* thou wilt: be the cup never so bitter to my taste, I will say, “Not my will, but thine be done.”]

^m Mic. vi. 9.

DCCVII.

THE LOVING-KINDNESS OF GOD.

Ps. cxix. 76. *Let, I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be for my comfort, according to thy word unto thy servant.*

THE peculiar construction of this psalm forbids us to look for much connexion between its several parts. It is composed of short detached sentences, committed to writing at different times as they occurred to the mind of the Royal penman, and after-

wards reduced to a certain kind of order; eight of them beginning with the same letter through all the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. If however we take the words of our text as connected with the preceding verse, we must understand it as a prayer that a sense of God's loving-kindness might be given him to comfort him under his afflictions. This sense we shall not exclude; though we shall not entirely limit it to this: for, if we take the words by themselves, they contain some peculiarly important hints, which we are desirous to impress upon your minds.

In elucidating them, we propose to shew,

I. What the Scriptures speak respecting the loving-kindness of God—

They are full of this glorious subject: they declare,

1. That it is the one source of all the benefits we enjoy—

[Survey the lustre and use of the heavenly bodies, the rich fecundity of the earth, the structure of the human body, or the faculties of the soul; Whence do they proceed? Who is their author; and by what motive was he actuated in bestowing them upon us? Can they be traced to any other source than the kindness of our God? Behold the gift, the stupendous gift of God's only dear Son, and of salvation by him! Can *this* be traced to any other source^a — — —]

2. That it is our chief support under all trials—

[We will grant something to philosophy; and acknowledge that it can fortify the mind in some degree: but it is not to be compared with religion in point of efficacy. *That* may silence murmurs, and produce a reluctant submission; but *this* will turn trials into an occasion of joy and glorying^b.]

3. That a comfortable sense of it is the privilege of all the Lord's people—

[God promises "his Holy Spirit unto all them that ask him." That Spirit shall be in them "a spirit of adoption," a witness, an earnest, a seal, a Comforter. From the days of Abel to the present hour, God has delighted to rejoice the souls of his servants by the testimonies of his love.]

But, if the loving-kindness of God be thus manifested to his people, it may be asked,

^a See John iii. 16. Tit. iii. 4, 5. Eph. ii. 7.

^b Rom. v. 1—3. Acts v. 41. and xvi. 25.

II. Why David prayed that it might be for his comfort?

He did so,

1. Because, without a sense of it, his trials would have been insupportable—

[David was exposed to many and severe trials: and, if he had not been favoured with peculiar supports, he would have sunk under them. This he often mentions ^c: and St. Paul also acknowledges his obligation to God for similar supports ^d. When such manifestations were withdrawn, even Jesus himself almost fainted ^e: but when they were vouchsafed, the weakest females were made triumphant over all the malice of their persecutors ^f.]

2. Because, though all are partakers of it, all do not find it to their comfort—

[How many have the blessings of health and wealth, who taste nothing of God's loving-kindness in them, but make them the occasions of more flagrant opposition to his will! How many have been restored to health, who by their subsequent misconduct have turned that mercy into a real curse! Above all, how many have made Christ himself a stumbling-block instead of a Saviour, and "the gospel a savour of death," when it might have been to them "a savour of life!" Thus would all men do, if they were left to themselves: even Hezekiah's miraculous recovery, and St. Paul's visit to the third heavens, would have issued only in their deeper condemnation, if God had not given grace to the one, and "a thorn in the flesh" to the other, to counteract the propensities of their fallen nature. Well then might David make this a matter of prayer to God, when none but God could impart to him this benefit.]

3. Because, if it be not to our comfort, it will be, in a most awful manner, to our discomfort—

[It is no light matter to abuse the merciful kindness of God. The day is coming, when every mercy we have received, must be accounted for; and when "it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrha than for those" who have slighted a preached gospel. Every mercy therefore should be received with a holy fear and jealousy, lest it should prove only an occasion of more aggravated guilt, and heavier condemnation.]

APPLICATION—

[Let us more frequently reflect on the loving-kindness of God^g—Let us meditate on it especially in seasons of trouble^h—And let us endeavour to requite it by devoting ourselves unreservedly to his serviceⁱ—]

^c 1 Sam. xxx. 6. and Ps. cxvi. 3—5. ^d 2 Cor. i. 3—5.

^e Matt. xxvii. 46. ^f Heb. xi. 35. ^g Ps. xxvi. 3. and lxiii. 3.

^h Ps. cxliii. 78. ⁱ Ps. cxvi. 12. and Isai. lxiii. 7.

DCCVIII.

DAVID'S BOASTING EXPLAINED AND VINDICATED.

Ps. cxix. 97—100. *O how love I thy Law! It is my meditation all the day. Thou, through thy commandments, hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts.*

NOTHING is more hateful than boasting. To boast of our superiority to others, as the Pharisees did, saying, "I thank thee, O Lord, that I am not as other men," is to betray an entire want of Christian humility, and an utter ignorance of our own state. But of all boasting, that which arises from a conceit of our own wisdom is perhaps the most odious and the most contemptible. "Be not wise in your own conceit^a," is a caution repeatedly given us in the Holy Scriptures; and an inattention to it will assuredly expose us to God's heavy displeasure^b. Yet there are occasions whereon we may, in appearance, transgress this duty, and yet be blameless. St. Paul was on some occasions necessitated to assert his claim to public authority, and his right to dictate to the Church of God: and though he apologised for his conduct in this respect, and called himself "a fool" for giving way to it, he yet felt it his duty, on the whole, to maintain the truth against those who opposed it, and to demand from others that deference which his Apostolic character authorised him to expect^c. In the passage before us, I must confess, David had no such call to exalt himself above others. But he wrote for the benefit of the Church of God in all ages: and therefore, whilst conveying general truths, "he transferred them to himself," in order that he might speak to better effect^d. His object was to shew, that every one who took the word of God for his guide would be so elevated by it above the most exalted of merely human characters, that he might justly arrogate to himself a wisdom superior to them all; since an

^a Prov. iii. 7. Rom. xii. 16.

^b Isai. v. 21.

^c 2 Cor. x. 7—11. and xi. 16—18. and xii. 11. ^d See 1 Cor. iv. 6.

unconverted character, whoever he might be, had no higher wisdom than that which was human; whilst the man who was taught by the word and Spirit of God, possessed a wisdom that was truly divine. In this view, then, I propose to vindicate the language of my text; and to shew, that David, in obeying the word of God, was “wiser than his *enemies*,” with all their *subtlety*; and “wiser than his *teachers*,” notwithstanding all their *learning*; and “wiser than the *ancients*,” in despite of all their *experience*. Of every one who is obedient to God’s word this may be said :
I. In that he answers more fully the ends for which the Holy Scripture was given—

[For what was the Scripture given, but to be a light to our feet and a lantern to our paths? — — — This being the case, what shall we say of the man who neglects to study the Inspired Volume? What should we say of a mariner, who, in navigating a sea that was full of rocks and quicksands, should neglect to consult his chart and his compass, or should proceed in his voyage with the same kind of confidence, in opposition to their dictates, as he would if he were following the course which they prescribed? Let him in other respects be ever so wise, no one would hesitate to commend the circumspect sailor as wiser than he. Then in this view, may the divinely-instructed follower of Christ account himself wiser than others, whether friends or enemies, if, when they enjoy the advantage of this infallible guide, they refuse to consult its dictates, or to follow its directions. If no one would hesitate to pronounce this judgment in a case where only the bodily life was concerned, much less would any one doubt where the interest at stake is nothing less than that of the immortal soul — — —]

II. In that he manifests a more becoming regard to the wonders revealed in it—

[Let any one contemplate the wonders of redemption — — — and say, whether he can be wise who neglects to search into them, and to improve them for the good of his soul? But the man who receives “the testimony of Christ,” and labours to have it “confirmed in his own soul,” is wise; and, when comparing himself with those who despise the Gospel, whatever superiority they may possess in other respects, may, without any undue arrogance, account himself wiser than they. “The very angels in heaven are desiring to look into these unsearchable mysteries;” and, “if we disregard them, what wisdom can be in us^e?”]

^e Jer. viii. 9.

III. In that he consults supremely those interests, which the Scriptures declare to be alone worthy of his attention—

[What can the whole world offer to a man, that is worthy to be put in competition with his soul? The concerns of the soul are declared by our blessed Lord to be “the one thing needful.” Let the most learned man upon the face of the earth neglect these concerns, and the most unlettered man make them the great objects of his undivided attention; shall we hesitate to say which of the two is the wiser man? He who is wise for time only, is a fool: but he who is wise for eternity, is truly wise. “The fear of the Lord is the very beginning of wisdom;” and he who possesses it not, has not ever yet passed the threshold of Wisdom’s porch: but “a good understanding have all they who cultivate the fear of the Lord; and the praise of their conduct shall endure for ever.”]

Let me, in CONCLUSION, give you,

1. A word of caution—

[Take not occasion, from these words of David, to think lightly of self-complacency and self-applause. David was no boaster: on the contrary, no one was ever lower in his own estimation than he: and you will find humility the most prominent feature of all the Scripture saints. “Less than the least of all saints” was the character which Paul assumed; and, “if he gloried at any time, it was of his infirmities alone,” that his Lord and Saviour might be the more glorified in him^f: so likewise I would recommend to you to “take the lowest place,” and, instead of exalting yourselves above others, to “prefer others in honour before yourselves,” and “to esteem others better than yourselves^g.” “for not he that commendeth himself shall be approved, but he whom the Lord commendeth^h.”]

2. A word of advice—

[“Love the word of God.” Verily, it is deserving of all your love — — — and you should “esteem it more than your necessary food.” Next, “meditate upon it all the day.” Many read the Scriptures without profit, because they do not ruminate upon them, and digest them in their souls. Let some short portion of God’s word be selected for your meditation every day; and you cannot fail to profit by it, especially if your meditations be turned into prayer. Lastly, take it as the only rule of your life. This is essential to the Christian character. A speculative knowledge, however extensive and accurate, will avail you nothing: it is the practical and experimental knowledge alone that can benefit the soul. The very use of the

^f 2 Cor. xii. 9. ^g Rom. xii. 10. ^h Phil. ii. 3. ^h 2 Cor. x. 18.

Scriptures is, to “perfect the man of God, and thoroughly to furnish him unto all good works.” *This* it is which will make you truly wise, or, rather, that will *prove* you to be so: for then will the Scripture “have had its perfect work,” and you will be “wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus.”]

DCCIX.

THE TRUE TEST OF RELIGION IN THE SOUL.

Ps. cxix. 128. *I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way.*

RELIGION is the same in every age. The doctrines of it, though they have been more fully and clearly revealed under the Christian dispensation, have never varied in substance; nor has the practice of it ever changed, except in the observance of rites and ceremonies. To love God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength, and our neighbour as ourselves, was the essence of true religion in the days of Abraham and of Moses; and so it is at this day. Doubtless there can be no true religion where the Gospel is set at nought and despised: but the Gospel may be highly approved as a system, whilst the heart is far from being right with God. It is not by their profession of any principles that we are to judge of men's states, but by the practical effects of those principles on their hearts and lives. Our blessed Lord has established this as the only true criterion, the only adequate test; “By their fruits ye shall know them.”

Now the genuine fruit of piety is as clearly exhibited in the words before us, as in any part of the Inspired Volume: and the passage is peculiarly worthy of notice, because in the writer of it were combined the fullest conviction of the understanding, together with the strongest affections of the heart: in his judgment, “he esteemed God's precepts to be right;” and in his heart, “he hated” every thing that was opposed to them.

May God of his infinite mercy inspire us with the same heavenly sentiments, whilst we consider these

two things,—*The Christian character as here delineated*, and *The light which it reflects upon the Gospel of Christ!*

I. The Christian character as here delineated—

In the text is drawn a broad line of distinction between the child of God, and every other person under heaven.

Christians are either nominal or real. Each class has gradations, from the highest to the lowest; but between the two classes there is an immense gulph, that separates them as far as the east is from the west. To ascertain to which of the two we belong, is of infinite importance; but self-love blinds our eyes, and renders the discovery of it extremely difficult. This Scripture however holds up, as it were, a mirror before us; and, if we will look steadfastly into it, we may discern with great precision what manner of persons we are.

The difference between the two classes is this: the nominal Christian, however eminent he may in appearance be, is partial in his regard for God's precepts^a: but the true Christian approves and loves them all without exception^b.

The nominal Christian, we say, is partial in his regard for God's precepts. He may esteem those *which countenance his own particular party*. The Papist, for instance, and the Protestant, will severally glory in those passages of Holy Writ which seem to justify their adherence to their respective modes of worship, and to afford them ground for believing that theirs is the more Scriptural and Apostolic Church. The various classes of Protestants also will manifest an ardent zeal for the support of their respective tenets, and be almost ready to anathematize each other, as not giving sufficient weight to those particular passages, on which they severally found their respective differences. They not only esteem their own grounds of faith "to be right," but they "hate" the sentiments opposed to them "as erroneous and false."

^a Mal. ii. 9.

^b Ps. cxix. 6.

The nominal Christian may also love those precepts *which do not materially condemn him*. The man who is sober, chaste, honest, just, temperate, benevolent, may take a real pleasure in such passages of Scripture as inculcate the virtues in which he supposes himself to have excelled; and may feel an indignation against the ways, by which those precepts are grossly violated.

He may yet further delight in such precepts as, according to his interpretation of them, *afford him ground for rejecting the Gospel*. No passages in all the word of God are more delightful to him than such as these: "Be not righteous overmuch;" and "What doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" He has no fear lest he should not be *righteous enough*; nor is he very anxious to inquire what is implied in *walking humbly* with God: it is sufficient for him that these passages are, in his eyes, opposed to what he calls enthusiasm; setting aside the necessity of faith in the Lord Jesus, and of a life of entire devotedness to his service: and his hatred of all passages that bear an opposite aspect, is in exact proportion to his zeal for these.

But, whilst such parts of Scripture are approved by him, does he love *all* that the Inspired Volume contains? Does he love those precepts which are *most sublime and spiritual*? No; it is no pleasure to him to hear of "setting his affections on things above," or of having "his conversation in heaven:" nor does it afford him any gratification to be told, that the measure of holiness which he must aspire after, is that which was exhibited in the Lord Jesus, whose example he is to follow in the whole of his spirit and temper, his conversation and conduct, "walking in all things as he walked."

Nor does he particularly affect those precepts which *require much self-denial*. "To crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts," and to root out from his soul every evil, though it be dear to him "as a right eye," or necessary to him as "a right hand," and to have a compliance with these precepts as his

only alternative between that and the taking his portion in "hell-fire," is no pleasing sound in his ears, notwithstanding it proceeds from the meek and lowly Jesus^c.

Least of all is he gratified with precepts that *strike at his besetting sin*. The proud man does not delight to hear the workings of pride delineated; nor the covetous man the evils of covetousness depicted; nor the gay and dissipated the folly of their ways exposed; nor the self-righteous man the delusive nature of his hopes declared. No, they are all ready to deride the statements that condemn their ways, just as the Pharisees derided our Lord, when he had unveiled their covetous and hypocritical devices; "The Pharisees were covetous (it is said), and they derided him." The hearts of these people rise against all such doctrines; and with no little bitterness they exclaim, "In so saying, thou reproachest us^d."

The true Christian, on the contrary, approves and loves all the commands of God; both *those which are evangelical*, and *those which are moral*.

He loves those which are *evangelical*. It is no grief to him to be told, that he must renounce all dependence on his own righteousness, and rely entirely on the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is rather with the most heartfelt delight that he hears those gracious commands, "Look unto me, and be ye saved;" "Come unto me, and I will give you rest;" "Believe on me, and have everlasting life." "He esteems these precepts to be right;" he feels them to be exactly suited to his necessities: he knows, and is assured, that his own righteousness is only as "filthy rags;" and that in any other garment than the robe of Christ's righteousness, it is impossible for him to stand in the presence of a holy God. He sees also that this mode of justification before God is the only one which can consist with the honour of God's justice, and with the demands of his law. Hence whatever opposes this way of salvation, "he hates;" yea, he shudders at the very thought of

^c Mark ix. 42—48.

^d Luke xi. 45.

claiming any thing on the ground of his own worthiness, saying, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." He thankfully traces all his mercies to the covenant made from all eternity between the Father and the Son; and to that covenant he looks, as "ordered in all things, and sure;" and from his inmost soul he says of it, "This is all my salvation, and all my desire."

Moreover, as the duty of coming to Christ, so the duty of "living altogether by faith in Christ," the duty of abiding in him as branches of the living vine, of receiving from his fulness continual supplies of grace and strength, and of "growing up into him in all things, as our living Head;" the duty, I say, of making him "our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, our redemption," our ALL, and of glorying in HIM, and in him *alone*; all this is heard by the true Christian with ineffable delight: he would that Christ should have all the glory: he sees it to be "right," that He who came down from heaven, and died upon the cross to save him, and ascended up on high, and has all fulness treasured up in him for the use of his Church and people, and who dwells in them "as their very life;" I say, he sees it "right," that this adorable Saviour should "be exalted, and extolled, and be very high;" yea, that he should be on earth, as he is in heaven, the one object of our adoration, and the continual theme of our praise. And, whilst a blind and ignorant world are ready to blame his zeal for the Redeemer's glory as carried to excess, his constant grief is, that he cannot love him more, and serve him better.

Nor is the true Christian less delighted with the *moral* precepts, not one of which would he desire to have relaxed or moderated in the smallest degree. Instead of wishing them to be lowered to the standard of his attainments, or regarding them as grievous on account of their purity, he loves them for their purity^e, and would esteem it his highest privilege to be conformed to them. He is well persuaded, that

^e Ps. cxix. 140.

they are all "holy, and just, and good:" and he loves them as *perfective of his nature, and conducive to his happiness.*

He loves them, I say, as *perfective of his nature.* For what is holiness, but a conformity to the Divine image, as sin is to the image of the devil? It was by transgression that man lost that resemblance to the Deity which was stamped upon him at his first creation; and it is by the new-creating influence of the Spirit quickening him to a course of holy obedience, that this resemblance is gradually restored. Conscious of this, he pants after holiness, desiring to "be changed into his Redeemer's image from glory to glory by the Spirit of the Lord."

Nor does he love them less as *conducive to his happiness:* for sin and misery are inseparable, as holiness also and true happiness are. What is the language of every precept in the Decalogue? It is this: 'Be holy, and be happy.' Of this he is convinced; and he finds, by daily experience, that "in keeping God's commandments there is great reward," and that "Wisdom's ways are indeed ways of pleasantness and peace."

At the same time, "he hates every false way;" every deviation from the perfect rule of righteousness is painful to him: he "hates it;" and hates himself on account of it. As a touch, which would scarcely be felt in any other part of the body, will occasion the severest anguish to the eye, so those thoughts or feelings which would be altogether unnoticed by other men, inflict a wound on his conscience, and cause him to go mournfully before the Lord of Hosts. Ask him on such an occasion, What it is that has caused him thus to mourn and weep? Is it that his God has required so much? No: but that he himself has attained so little. He wants to "be sanctified wholly to the Lord, in body, soul, and spirit;" and, could he accomplish the desire of his heart, he would "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God." This is the object of his highest ambition; and, when he finds, that, notwithstanding all his efforts, he still

falls short of it, he groans inwardly, and says with the Apostle, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of sin and death?"

Behold, then, the Christian's character as here delineated. To a superficial observer he may not appear to differ much from others; but to those who have had opportunities of discovering the real desires of his soul, he is a perfect contrast with the whole ungodly world. The very best of nominal Christians are content with low attainments, and plead for indulgences in those things which are agreeable to their corrupt nature. The more sublime and spiritual precepts they soften down to the standard of their own practice; and rather applaud themselves for their excellencies, than lothe themselves for their defects. The true Christian, on the contrary, will admit of no standard but that of absolute perfection: and, whereinsoever he falls short of it, as he does in his very best services, he lothes and "abhors himself in dust and ashes;" nor has he any hope of acceptance with God, but in the view of that atonement which was once offered for him on the cross, and of that blood which the Lord Jesus Christ once shed on Calvary to cleanse him from his sins. We mean not to say, that these defects are subversive of all the Christian's peace; for, if that were the case, who could possess any peace at all? The Christian, notwithstanding his imperfections, has "comfort in the testimony of a good conscience," and in an assurance, that his God will "not be extreme to mark what is done amiss;" but he does not on this account *allow himself* in any sin whatever. The use he makes of his own corruptions is, to cleave the more steadfastly to Christ as his only hope, and to watch and pray the more diligently, that he may be preserved from evil, and be enabled by Divine grace to endure unto the end.

Now this description of the Christian's character leads me to shew,

II. The light it reflects on the Gospel of Christ—

Three things it suggests to us; namely,
 An answer to those who misrepresent the Gospel—
 A reproof to those who would abuse the Gospel—and
 A direction to those who would adorn the Gospel.

First, we may derive from hence *an answer to those who misrepresent the Gospel*. It has in all ages been a favourite argument against the Gospel, that it supercedes the necessity of good works, and opens the flood-gates of licentiousness. It was urged repeatedly against St. Paul himself; who on that account set himself to answer it with all imaginable care: “Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?” And again, “Shall we sin because we are not under the law, but under grace?” To both these questions he answers with holy indignation, “God forbid!” And, when his enemies went so far as to *affirm*, that he gave men a licence to sin, saying, “Let us do evil that good may come;” he scorned to return any other answer than this, “Their damnation is just.” And it were greatly to be wished, that those who now so confidently repeat these accusations against the followers of St. Paul, would reflect on the guilt they incur, and the danger to which, by such calumnies, they expose themselves. To this present hour the same objections are made to all those statements which resemble Paul’s. If we deny to good works the office of justifying the soul, we are represented as denying the necessity of them altogether. Though these objections have been refuted a thousand times, and should be refuted ten thousand times more, the enemies of the Gospel will still repeat them with as much confidence as ever. Let them, however, look into our text, and see what David’s principles were. Of all the Old Testament saints, there was not one who more determinately sought to be justified by the righteousness of Christ without any works of his own, than he. Hear what is said of him by St. Paul, in confirmation of the very sentiments which Paul himself maintained; “To him that *worketh not*, but believeth in him that *justifieth the ungodly*, his faith is

counted for righteousness: EVEN AS DAVID describeth the blessedness of the man unto whom *God imputeth righteousness without works*, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin^f." Here we have a full exposition of David's views respecting the Gospel. And how did these views operate on his soul? Did the idea of being justified by a righteousness not his own, a righteousness without works, a righteousness imputed to him, and apprehended solely by faith, did this, I say, make him regardless of good works? No: look at the text, thou Objector, and be convinced: look at the text, thou Calumniator, and blush.

Search, next, the writings of St. Paul, and see whether there was any difference in this respect between him and David? Was there in theory? No: for St. Paul affirms, that "the grace of God which bringeth salvation teaches us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live righteously, soberly, and godly, in this present world." Was there in practice? No: neither David nor any other Saint ever made higher attainments in holiness than St. Paul: "he was not a whit behind the very chiefest Apostles."

Perhaps it will be said that the professed followers of St. Paul differ from him in this respect; and that, whilst in speculation they adopt his doctrine, in practice they deny its sanctifying efficacy. That there are Antinomians in the world, we confess: there were in the days of Christ and his Apostles; some who called Christ, "Lord! Lord! whilst yet they did not the things which he commanded;" and some, who "professed to know God, but in works denied him." And it must be expected, that, corrupt as human nature is, such characters will be found in every age. But is such conduct the necessary result of these principles? Was it so in the Apostles' days? or is it so at this day? If justification by faith alone be necessarily productive of laxness in morals, whence

^f Rom. iv. 5—8.

comes it that a higher tone of morality is universally expected from those who maintain that doctrine, than from others? Whence is it that the smallest evils in such persons are more severely marked, than the most licentious courses of the ungodly world? We appeal to all who hear us, Whether, if a professor, and especially a preacher, of this doctrine were to demean himself in all things for one single day in the way that the generality of his own age and station live all the year round, the mouths of all who beheld him would not be opened against him as a hypocrite[§]? Whence should this be, if those who maintain the doctrine of justification by faith alone, represented it as liberating men from their obligation to good works? And how comes it, that the very persons who are complained of for the licentious tendency of their principles, should at the same time be universally condemned for the over-righteous sanctity of their lives?

To all, then, who misrepresent the Gospel, we would give this reply:—Look at David, and see what the effect of the Gospel had on him: look at Paul, and contemplate its effects on him: look at the uniform declarations of Scripture, and see what was the life of all the primitive Believers: nay, look only at the expectations which you yourselves have formed: for, if you see a professor of the Gospel act unworthy of his profession, you deem him inconsistent; which

§ It having been observed to the author, that the words “age and station” might be mistaken for age and *order*, and thus be supposed to aim at *the Clergy*, he judges it right to guard against any such misconception of his meaning. The scope of his observation is this: A Professor, and especially a Preacher, of the doctrines here referred to, is expected to be more strict in his conduct than others who deny those doctrines. And, whether he be young or old, or of the higher or lower orders of society, if he were to manifest the same worldly spirit, to avow the same worldly sentiments, to shew the same indifference to religion, and to indulge in the same latitude of conversation altogether, as *the generality* of others who are of the same age and rank of life do, he would be accounted most glaringly and grossly inconsistent. *Some*, notwithstanding their aversion to these doctrines, are more guarded in their spirit and conversation; but *the generality* are not: and therefore the author purposely limited his observations to “*the generality*.”

is a proof, that both the obligation to holiness is acknowledged on his part, and the performance of it is expected on yours; and consequently, that the Gospel is, by your mutual consent, "a doctrine according to godliness."

From the passage before us, we may in the next place, offer *a reproof to those who would abuse the Gospel*. We have already acknowledged, and with deep grief we confess it, that there are some persons professedly of Antinomian principles, who are so occupied with contemplating what Christ has wrought out *for* them, that they cannot bestow a thought on what he has engaged to work *in* them. To speak of holiness, or any point of duty, they account low, and legal: yea, they think that Christ has by his own obedience to the law superseded the necessity of holiness in us; and that the whole work of salvation is so finished by him, that there remains nothing to be done by us, nothing of repentance for sin, nothing of obedience to God's commands, but solely to maintain confidence in the provisions of God's everlasting Covenant, and to rejoice in God as our God and portion.

Shocking as these sentiments are, they have been professed of late to a great extent; and many have been deceived by them: but, to show how unscriptural they are, we need only refer to the character of David, as drawn in the words of our text: Does he discard the law as a rule of life? Does he pour contempt upon the precepts of God as unworthy of his notice? No: throughout all his Psalms he speaks of them as objects of his supreme delight: "O how I love thy law! all the day long is my study in it." "I love thy precepts above gold; they are sweeter to me than honey and the honey-comb." To the same effect St. Paul also speaks: "I consent unto the law that it is good:" and again, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man!" He does, it is true, speak of himself as "dead to the law;" and of the law as dead with respect to him; and from thence, that the marriage bonds, by which the law and we were formerly united, are for ever dissolved. But

what use does he teach us to make of this liberty? Does he speak of it as freeing us from all moral restraints? No; but as a reason for our giving up ourselves henceforth in a marriage union to Christ as our second husband, *that we may bring forth fruit unto God*^h. Now then, we would ask, Were David and Paul right? If so, what must we think of the sentiments of these deluded people? Are they more spiritual than David? or have they a deeper insight into the Gospel than Paul? The very circumstance of their discarding all the exhortations of St. Paul, and casting behind them all his practical instructions, demonstrates, that they are, for the present at least, “given up to a delusion, to believe a lie.” Some of them, we trust, do not practically live according to these principles; and, where this is the case, we hope that God, in his mercy, will sooner or later give them to see their errors: but, if they practically carry into effect their principles, they will have reason to curse the day that ever they were born.

To the younger part of our audience we will beg permission to suggest a few hints on this important subject.

You, when you go into the world, will be in danger of being ensnared by people of this stamp. There is something very imposing in the idea of glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ, and of making him “all in all.” The devout mind is delighted with this thought; and is easily induced to regard with jealousy any thing that may be supposed to interfere with it. But be not wise above that which is written; and let nothing tempt you to imagine, that you can honour Christ by setting aside any of his commandments. It is by your love to his commandments that you are to approve yourselves his disciples; and however delighted you may be with the visions of Mount Tabor, you must never forget that you have work also to do in the plainⁱ. We are far from wishing any one to be working from self-righteous principles, or in a legal spirit: nor would we utter a word that should

^h Rom. vii. 1—4. with Gal. ii. 19.

ⁱ Luke ix. 33, 37.

discourage the fullest confidence in God. It is our privilege, doubtless, to trace all our mercies up to his everlasting love, and to view them all as secured to us by covenant and by oath^k: but then it is no less our privilege to fulfil God's will, and to resemble the holy angels, of whom it is said, that "they do his commandments, hearkening to the voice of his word." Beware then lest ye ever be led off from this ground. Rejoice in the Lord Jesus Christ, as the propitiation for your sins, as your all-prevailing Advocate, and as your living Head: but, whilst you believe in him, and love him, and rejoice in him, let your faith, and love, and joy, stimulate you to a holy and unreserved obedience. If he has "set your heart at liberty," let the effect be to "make you run with more enlargement the way of his commandments."

Lastly, we may derive from our text *a direction to those who would adorn the Gospel*. "Esteem all God's precepts to be right, and hate every false way." If God has enjoined any thing, do not ask whether the world approves of it; nor, if he have forbidden any thing, inquire of the world, whether you shall abstain from it. The world are as inadequate judges of Christian morality, as they are of Christian principles: both the one and the other are "foolishness to the natural man." Of all the sublimer precepts, whether evangelical or moral, they are ready to say, "This is a hard saying, who can hear it?" But let no true Christian "consult with flesh and blood." Let him rather say with David, "Away from me ye wicked: I will keep the commandments of my God." Does God call you to "live no longer to yourselves, but unto him?" or, Does the Lord Jesus Christ bid you "follow him without the camp, bearing his reproach;" and readily to "lay down your lives for his sake?" Let "not these commandments be grievous in your eyes;" but rather "rejoice if you are counted worthy to suffer for his sake." If at any time you be urged to turn aside from the path of duty, do not let the maxims or habits of the world bias you one

^k Heb. vi. 17, 18.

moment : you are “ not to follow a multitude to do evil :” if a thing be right, you should love it and cleave to it, though the whole world should be against you ; just as Noah, Daniel, and Elijah did : and, if a thing be evil, you must not do it, though the loss of all things, yea even of life itself, should await you for your integrity. It were better far to go into a fiery furnace for your steadfastness, than to save yourselves by an undue compliance.

Doubtless this holy walk and conversation will involve you in the charge of singularity ; but whose fault is it, if this conduct makes you singular ? Is it yours ? Is it not rather theirs, who will not yield obedience to the precepts of their God ? We mean not by this to justify any who would affect a needless singularity : far from it : it is only where the world are wrong, that we would recommend any to separate from them. But wheresoever they are wrong, there you must “ quit yourselves like men,” and shew them by your example a more perfect way. In important matters, the whole universe should not shake your resolution. Where duty evidently calls, you must be firm, and “ faithful unto death.” It is confessedly “ a strait and narrow way” in which you are called to walk ; and, whilst walking in it, you must of necessity, like Noah, “ condemn those” who are walking in “ the broad road that leadeth to destruction¹ ;” and consequently, like him, you must incur the scorn and hatred of an ungodly world. But it is better far to brave the hatred of the ungodly, than to participate in the lot that shortly awaits them.

To all, then, who would “ adorn the doctrine of our Saviour,” we beg leave to offer this plain and salutary DIRECTION—

“ Let your light shine before men ;” and let it shine so bright, as to “ put to silence the ignorance of foolish men,” and to “ make those ashamed, who falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.” Labour habitually to do this in every thing that

¹ Heb. xi. 7.

relates either to God or man. Let your enemies, if possible, "have no evil thing to say of you;" nothing to lay hold of; nothing that shall give occasion for that malignant triumph, "There! there! so would we have it." Be jealous for the honour of Christ and his Gospel. Remember that the world, who are blind enough to each other's faults, will be eagle-eyed in discerning yours: while they will make allowances enough for each other, they will make no allowances for you: and whilst they impute each other's frailties to the weakness of human nature, they will impute yours to the principles you profess. Be careful then to "cut off occasion from those who seek occasion against you." Watch over your whole temper, and spirit, and conduct; that "your conversation may be altogether such as becometh the Gospel of Christ:" and "let your light be like that of the sun, shining more and more unto the perfect day." In a word, "be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; knowing assuredly, that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord."

DCCX.

THE CHRISTIAN'S CHIEF DESIRES.

Ps. xcix. 132, 133. *Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name. Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me.*

TO many, the Psalms are less interesting than most other parts of Scripture, as having in them a less variety of incident whereon to engraft instruction, as also a less measure of plainness in the instruction they convey. But, whatever may be wanting in them in these respects, it is more than compensated by the piety of sentiment and ardour of devotion which pervade them all. If other parts of Scripture add more to our stock of knowledge, this produces a more elevated tone of feeling, and, if deeply studied, tends in a pre-eminent degree to bring the soul into communion with its God, and to prepare it for the

enjoyment of the heavenly world. Let us but get the spirit of the Psalmist in the prayer before us, and we shall have no reason to complain that we were not amused with curious speculations, or edified with matters of deep research.

Our business on the present occasion will be quite simple, namely,

I. To explain the petitions here offered—

Two things the Psalmist here implores of God ;

1. The manifestations of his mercy—

[Mercy is that which every child of Adam needs : he needs it too, not merely for some particular violations of God's law, but for every action of his life : there is iniquity even in his holiest things : his very tears need to be washed, and his repentances to be repented of. Hence he must, from the very beginning to the end of life, and in reference to every moment that he has lived, implore mercy at the hands of the heart-searching God — — —

In this request he sets, as it were, before his eyes all the instances of mercy which God has shewn to his most favoured people from the foundation of the world. We may indeed understand his words as a general kind of plea taken from the wonted goodness of God to others : and then this petition will accord with that offered in another psalm, “Remember me with the favour which thou bearest unto thy chosen ; O visit me with thy salvation^a !” But there seems here a more specific reference to some particular exhibitions of God's mercy in the days of old ; multitudes of which must of necessity present themselves to his mind, whenever his attention was directed towards them. What mercy had God shewn to Adam, in promising a Saviour to him, instead of inflicting on him the judgments he had so deeply merited ! What mercy to Abel also, in giving him such manifest tokens of his favour ! To Enoch also, in affording him such constant access to him, and in translating him to glory, without ever suffering him to taste the bitterness of death ! In like manner his mercy to Noah, in delivering him from the deluge which overwhelmed the whole world beside ; and to Abraham also, whom he admitted to all the familiarity of a most endeared friend. These, and many other instances, we may suppose to have been in his mind, when he proposed them to God as patterns of the mercy which he himself desired to partake of.

This is the true way in which every child of God should pray. From all that God has done for his saints in former

^a Ps. cvi. 4, 5.

times he should take encouragement, and should enlarge his expectations to the utmost extent that the sacred records authorize. God is the same gracious and almighty Being in every age: and what he has done for one he may do for another: and though he may not vouchsafe to us precisely the same interpositions as he did to others, he will, as far as our particular occasions may call for them: and we are enemies to ourselves, if we do not open our mouths wide, and ask all that our situation and circumstances can require.]

2. The communications of his grace—

[He desired to be delivered, not from guilt only, but from the power and dominion of sin also. This desire was without reserve: he wished not to retain “*any* iniquity,” however pleasant or profitable, or even justifiable it might be in the eyes of an ungodly world. In this he approved himself sincere and upright: and in this, every true Christian will resemble him — — —

But in order to this, he begged to be guided altogether by the oracles of truth. The word of God is the only standard of right and wrong: if we follow any other directory, we shall err: if we adhere to that, we cannot but fulfil the will of God. This is the constant declaration of God himself^b; and it accords with the experience of his people in every age^c. Happy would it be for us, if we would study the Scriptures with this particular view. We are not disposed to undervalue speculative knowledge: but that which is practical is infinitely to be preferred. The Scriptures are given us as a “light to our paths” in general, and as “a lantern” in every particular case when we know not where to place “our feet.” Let us truly seek to be in every thing governed by them; and then, though we be mere fools, as it were, in other things, we shall never greatly err^d.]

From this general view of the petitions, we proceed,

II. To shew the instruction to be derived from them—

Though not written with a didactic view, they convey much instruction, in reference both,

1. To Christian principles—

[The *union* of the two petitions may not improperly suggest to us, that a desire after pardon must invariably be joined with a desire of sanctification also. Were a desire of pardon all that is required to form the Christian character, a Christian would differ but little from those who are gone beyond redemption. Sin must be hateful to us, even as it is to God himself, who cannot look upon it without the utmost abhorrence — — —

Nor is the *order* in which they stand devoid of good and

^b ver. 9.

^c ver. 11.

^d Ps. xix. 7. Isai. xxxv. 8.

useful instruction. Mercy is to be sought *in the first place*. To look for sanctification first, and make that a ground whereon to hope for mercy, would subvert the whole Gospel of Christ. We mean not to say, that we should build such an observation as this on the mere circumstance of the petitions occurring in that particular order; for that circumstance would by no means justify any such conclusion: but from that circumstance we may fitly take occasion to make such an observation which is sanctioned and confirmed by every part of the inspired writings. And we cannot too strongly impress it on the minds of all, that in constructing the spiritual edifice, we must ever be careful to distinguish between the foundation and the superstructure, and to assign to each its appropriate place and office — — —]

2. To Christian practice—

[Here the just improvement of the petitions is clear and obvious: they teach us to be *humble* Christians, *practical* Christians, *consistent* Christians.

We should be *humble* Christians. The manner in which the petition for mercy is expressed conveys an idea of deep humility. It is as if he had said, "Lord, I am unworthy that thou shouldst look upon so base, so vile a creature as I am: well might my sins provoke thee to hide thy face from me for ever: but O! look upon me, according to the multitude of thy tender mercies." Thus it is that we should ever seek for mercy. It is impossible for us ever to lie too low before our God. To the latest hour of our lives we should preserve the spirit of the publican, who, whilst he sought for mercy, "dared not so much as to lift up his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner!" — — —

We should also be *practical* Christians. To think that we can be interested in the mercy of God whilst we are continuing in sin, is a horrible, a fatal delusion. Let not any one entertain such an idea for one moment. Christ's work is finished indeed as it respects *himself*; but not as it respects *us*: there is a work to be wrought *in* us, as well as that which has been wrought *for* us: and whatever we may imagine about the secret purposes of God, this is revealed as an immutable decree, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord" — — —

To crown the whole, we must be *consistent* Christians. To harbour *any* sin, of whatever kind it be, will prove us hypocrites. "If we regard iniquity in our hearts, God will never hear us," never accept us. The right hand or right eye must be sacrificed, as well as those sins which may be more easily put away — — — O let us seek to be "Israelites indeed, in whom there is no guile," and to be "sincere and without offence until the day of Christ!"]

DCCXI.

REASONS FOR WEeping OVER SINNERS.

Ps. cxix. 136. *Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law.*

THE generality, if exhorted to labour for the salvation of others, are ready to reply, “Am I my brother’s keeper^a?” But they who have truly the fear of God in their hearts will be anxious for the welfare of their fellow-creatures. This concern has at all times distinguished the saints of God^b: and it was eminently conspicuous in David. Repeatedly in this psalm does he declare his feelings on this subject^c; and with peculiar energy in the words before us.

We propose to shew on what account we ought to weep for sinners—

I. On account of the blessings they lose—

There are many *present* blessings which men lose by not keeping God’s law—

[There is a “peace that passeth understanding,” and a “joy unspeakable,” that attends the believing in Christ, and the devoting of ourselves to his service. The having all one’s lusts in subjection must contribute not a little to serenity of mind; but the enjoying of God’s favour, and the light of his countenance, is a source of the richest happiness that mortals can possess on earth^d.”

But what peace is there to the wicked^e? What can he know of the love of God shed abroad in his heart? What comfort can he have in the prospect of death and judgment?]

But the *eternal* blessings which they lose, exceed our highest conceptions—

[The obedient believer has “an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and never-fading^f.” There is a crown of righteousness, and a throne of glory, reserved for him in heaven^g: and he shall spend eternity itself in the immediate vision and fruition of his God.

But can we say this respecting the impenitent and unbelieving? No: there is no admission for him into those bright abodes: “the unrighteous cannot inherit that kingdom^h.”

^a Gen. iv. 9.^b Jer. ix. 1.^c ver. 158. and 53.^d ver. 165. Prov. iii. 17. Isai. xxxii. 17.^e Isai. lvii. 20, 21.^f 1 Pet. i. 4.^g 2 Tim. iv. 8.^h 1 Cor. vi. 9.

“the unclean cannot enter thereⁱ.” There shall be “a difference between those who serve God, and those who serve him not^k :” and the wish that ungodly men feel to be found at last in the place of those whom they now despise, is a proof that they have in their own minds some apprehension of the sentence that awaits them in another world^l.]

And are not these things matters of just lamentation ?

[It is much to be regretted that men will “feed on ashes^m,” and seek to “fill their belly with the east windⁿ,” when they might “eat the bread of life,” and “delight their souls with marrow and fatness^o.” And still more must we pity him, who, when there is a rest prepared, and a supper spread for him in heaven, has provoked God to swear, that he shall never enter into that rest^p, nor ever partake of that supper^q.]

But there is yet greater reason to weep,

II. On account of the miseries they bring upon themselves—

Not to mention the misery of a guilty conscience, which in many instances is so great as to render life itself a burthen—

How inexpressibly dreadful are the judgments which the wicked will endure in hell !

[However men may labour to disprove it, hell must be the portion of all that forget God^r. And who can form any adequate conception of the torments that shall be there endured ? To spend an eternity in such a furnace as that which Nebuchadnezzar kindled for the destruction of the Hebrew youths, would be beyond measure dreadful : but what must it be to lie down in that lake of fire which the breath of the Almighty hath kindled^s ?]

And can we view sinners hastening to that place of torment, and not weep over them ?

[Our blessed Lord wept over Jerusalem on account of the *temporal* calamities that should come upon it : and shall not we weep over the *eternal* miseries which men are bringing on themselves ? Must not our hearts be harder than adamant, if they do not melt into tears at such a sight ? Can we weep at the recital of a story we know to be fictitious, and not mourn over such awful realities ?]

There is, however, yet greater reason to weep,

ⁱ Rev. xxi. 27.

^k Mal. iii. 18.

^l Numb. xxiii. 10.

^m Isai. xlv. 20.

ⁿ Job xv. 2.

^o Isai. lv. 2.

^p Heb. iii. 18.

^q Luke xiv. 24.

^r Ps. ix. 17.

^s Isai. xxx. 33.

III. On account of the aggravated guilt under which they perish—

Devils and heathens will have more to urge on their own behalf, than they who perish under the light of the Gospel—

[The devils may say, Had the Son of God taken our nature, and died for our redemption, we would gladly have availed ourselves of such a provision for our safety; we never would have despised one that had been sent from heaven to redeem us. The heathens may say, Though there was a Saviour given, yet we were never privileged to hear his gospel: had his mercy been ever offered to us, we should “long ago have repented in dust and ashes^t.” But what will ungodly *Christians* say before God? Will they say, They had not a Saviour? or, That his Gospel was not proclaimed to them? No: you know there is a Saviour, who bought you with his blood, and who has offered you, times without number, a full and free salvation. Your mouths therefore must be for ever shut^u.]

What additional reason does this give for weeping over the ungodly!

[Every offer of salvation greatly aggravates the guilt of those who reject it: and every increase of guilt will be followed by a proportionable increase of misery. How lamentable then is it, when that very gospel, which should have been a savour of life unto life, is made, through the obstinacy of man, a savour of death unto death^x! How truly lamentable when Christ himself becomes an occasion of greater damnation to the very people whom he died to save! Alas! that men should ever so despise their own mercies! O that “*rivers* of tears might run down our eyes!”]

INFER—

1. How little true love is there in the world!

[However strong and numerous the instances of men’s carnal attachment be, there are few indeed who manifest any regard for the souls of their fellow-creatures. Instead of weeping for others, the generality would laugh at those who wept for themselves. But, if we have not this mark in our forehead, we are destined to feel the stroke of God’s avenging rod^y.]

2. How earnest ought ministers to be in dealing with the souls of men!

[If all ought to weep for the ungodly, much more should ministers, who are sent to call them to repentance, “warn them

^t Matt. xi. 21.

^u Matt. xxii. 12.

^x 2 Cor. ii. 15, 16.

^y Ezek. ix. 4—6.

night and day with tears^z." Forgive then the earnestness, we should rather say, the want of earnestness, of him who labours among you; and pray, that he may so "declare the whole counsel of God," as to be pure from the blood of all men."]

3. How earnest ought men to be in seeking the salvation of their own souls!

[If it be the duty of others to weep for us, how much more should we weep for ourselves! Let us then lay to heart the state of our souls, and sow in tears that we may reap in joy^a."]

^z Acts xx. 31.

^a Ps. cxxvi. 5.

DCCXII.

DAVID'S DESIRE TO SERVE GOD.

Ps. cxix. 145—148. *I cried with my whole heart; Hear me, O Lord: I will keep thy statutes. I cried unto thee; save me, and I shall keep thy testimonies. I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried: I hoped in thy word. Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word.*

IN reading the Psalms of David, we are of necessity led to contemplate the constant spirituality of his mind, and the extraordinary fervour of his devotions: but we are apt to overlook, or to notice only superficially, one of the most lovely features in his character, namely, his ardent desire to fulfil the whole will of God. If we were to read the psalm before us in this particular view, we should be surprised, that we had not been more forcibly struck with this sentiment before. He begins the psalm by declaring those persons pre-eminently blessed, who are most distinguished by their obedience to the laws of God^a. In this way alone had he any hope of avoiding shame and disappointment in the last day^b; and therefore he prayed with all imaginable earnestness, that he might be kept from ever deviating from the path of duty^c, and be enabled to "run the way of God's commandments with an enlarged heart^d." The words which we have just read do not, on a superficial view, convey this idea very strongly to our minds: but on a closer inspection of them, we shall see, that a desire to serve and honour God was the primary object in

^a ver. 1, 2.

^b ver. 6.

^c ver. 10, 19, 20.

^d ver. 32.

his petitions, and that even salvation itself was chiefly sought by him on account of the sanctifying and transforming efficacy with which it would be accompanied. Bearing this in mind, we will notice,

I. The object of his desires—

There is no reason to suppose that David alludes to any particular distress or difficulty in these petitions: he seems rather to refer to the whole work of grace and salvation, which he wished to have forwarded in his soul: and he does not merely *engage* to make a practical improvement of the grace that shall be given him, but rather *expresses the satisfaction he felt in looking forward to its effects*. Had he merely prayed to God for the salvation of his soul, we should not have disapproved his petitions; because it is proper and necessary for every man to seek above all things the salvation of his soul. But the having such respect to holiness, and the desiring of salvation itself chiefly in reference to that, is a higher style of piety; as we propose more distinctly under this head to shew.

1. It argues a nobler disposition—

[A desire after salvation does not of necessity imply any real love to God. A slave may wish to escape the lash of his master, and yet have no delight in his service: and we also may seek deliverance from condemnation, without any ingenuous feelings towards God. Simon Magus desired the intercessions of Peter and John in his behalf; but he was actuated by no better motive than a fear of the judgments denounced against him^e. But when a person desires to attain the Divine image, and makes the glorifying of God, by a holy conversation, the main object of his pursuit, he shews a nobility of mind, and an enlargement of heart, which none but God can bestow. A man by the mere force of natural selfishness may long for pardon; but no man without supernatural grace, can pant after real holiness.]

2. It shews juster views of the nature and source of true happiness—

[If a man *were* pardoned, he could not be happy, if he were not holy: for sin would ever eat as a canker, and destroy his peace — — Even heaven itself would be no heaven to one who was not possessed of heavenly dispositions: for what

^e Acts viii. 24.

communion could he have with the glorified saints and angels, all of whom are holy as God is holy, and perfect as God is perfect? The angels are represented as ever "fulfilling God's will, and hearkening to the voice of his word," with an ardent desire to follow the very first intimations of the Divine pleasure. The saints also "rest not day nor night, singing" with all their powers the praises of their most adorable Redeemer. But how would such an occupation suit those who have no preparation of heart for it? But a disposition to execute the will of God will make a person happy in every situation. If he be bereft of all outward comforts, he will "enjoy the testimony of a good conscience:" so that the person who desires holiness in the first place, proves that his judgment is well informed; and that he justly appreciates that important saying, "The work of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness is quietness and assurance for ever."]

3. It most corresponds with the ends which the Governor of the universe proposes to himself in all his dispensations—

[God, in creating all things, formed them for his own glory; as it is said, "For thy glory they are, and were created." In all the works of his providence also he has designed to bind men to himself in a way of uniform and unreserved obedience. This was especially his end in all that he did for the Israelites in the wilderness; he did it, "that they might keep his statutes and observe his laws^f." In the great work of redemption he had the same blessed object in view, namely, "that we might serve him without fear, in righteousness and holiness before him all the days of our life^g." "This people have I formed for myself, that they may shew forth my praise." Now in desiring salvation for holiness sake, and in praying for deliverance from all the bonds of sin, in order to "run with more enlarged hearts the way of God's commands," we forward the everlasting counsels of the Deity, and prove ourselves, in the most important of all concerns, like-minded with God.]

The worthiness of his object was justly marked by,
 II. The ardour of his pursuit—

This blessed object he sought,

1. In fervent and continual prayer--

[Observe his own account: "I cried, I cried, I cried;" I cried "with my heart," with "my whole heart." What can we conceive more expressive than such language as this? Yet we are sure he did not exaggerate, or state any thing that was not strictly true. Moreover, so ardent was his mind in these holy

^f Ps. cv. 45.

^g Luke i. 74, 75.

exercises, and so great his delight in them, that he “prevented the dawning of the morning,” and rose often while it was yet dark, in order to pour out his soul before God.

Now this shews us how the renovation and salvation of the soul should be sought by every child of man. It should occupy our whole mind; it should engage our whole soul. To seek it in a lukewarm and listless way, is to shew that we have no just value for our souls, and no real delight in God. Examine, we beseech you, beloved Brethren, how it is with you in this respect — — — for ye may as surely know by this the state of your souls before God, as if ye were to look into the very book of God’s remembrance — — — You must distinguish also carefully between the exertions that are made in your own strength, and the efforts which are made in prayer to obtain help from God. It is from these that you must judge of your self-knowledge, and humility, and dependence upon God: for in proportion only as you feel your own weakness, and his readiness to aid you, will your application to him be such as David’s was — — —]

2. In a believing dependence on God’s word—

[The word of God meditated on, and applied to the soul by faith, is the great support and encouragement of all who desire mercy at God’s hands: and David “prevented the night-watches” in order to read it, and meditate upon it, and pray over it. Thus it should be with us also. O then let me ask, Is the blessed word of God the one rule of your desires, and the one ground of your expectations? and in this view is it your meditation day and night? — — — Here again you may obtain an insight into the state of your souls, and learn to estimate with precision your spiritual attainments. You may, as biblical students, be extremely diligent, consuming the midnight oil, and labouring all the day, without being at all nearer to God than those who never look into the sacred records. The question is, Whether you lay hold of it as a word of promise from God to you, and whether you plead it day and night before God in prayer? — — — This will prove you Christians indeed; more especially if the promises of grace for your sanctification be as dear to you as the promises of mercy for your pardon and acceptance. This is the habit of mind which God approves, and which will assuredly issue in everlasting salvation — — —]

APPLICATION—

1. How have your minds hitherto been exercised in relation to eternal things?

[Have you thus redeemed time, even from your sleep, for the purpose of forwarding with all possible earnestness the welfare of your souls? — — —]

2. What are your views and purposes respecting them in future ?

[Are you procrastinating, and wasting your time in indolent habits or worthless pursuits? — — — O! awake from your slumbers: up, and be doing: and the Lord be with you!]

DCCXIII.

BLESSEDNESS OF THOSE WHO LOVE GOD'S LAW.

Ps. cxix. 165. *Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.*

THE force of principle is exceeding great, even where the principle itself is erroneous and vicious, but much more where it is founded upon the unerring word of God. It produces in our conduct, promptitude, uniformity, decision: and, whilst it stimulates to action, it supports the mind in case of failure and disappointment. Now of all principles, that of love to God and to his revealed will is the strongest. We see in the saints of every age what wonders it is able to effect — — — In the words before us, David informs us what peace it will bring into the soul amidst the heaviest trials, and what stability amidst the greatest difficulties. But for the more full elucidation of his words, we will consider,

I. The character here described—

“The law of God” generally throughout the Psalms means the whole revealed will of God. It is not to be confined to the moral, or the ceremonial law; it comprehends the Gospel also: it is “the law which should go forth out of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem;” even, as St. Paul calls it, “the law of faith.”

To “love” this law is a strong expression, importing much more than a mere obedience to it: for we may conceive persons to obey it through fear; whereas those who love it, see an excellency in it, and cordially approve of it in all its parts. They love it,

1. As a mirror of truth—

[In this view it is spoken of by an inspired Apostle^a; and it is justly so represented, because it reflects with perfect fidelity

^a Jam. i. 23—25.

every feature of the human heart. It never flatters, never distorts; but shews, to every one who will look into it, precisely what character he bears in the sight of the heart-searching God. An insincere person does not like it; he turns away from it: he will not come to it, because it presents to his view his own deformities. But the true Christian loves it on this very account. He desires to know the worst of himself. He sees that it will be to no purpose for him to deceive his own soul: he is assured that God will not form his estimate according to the partial views which he himself may take: and therefore he desires to see himself just as God sees him. True it is, that he never looks into this glass without finding deeper and deeper cause for humiliation — — — but still he loves it; yea, he loves it *on this very account*; even as David did, when he said, “Thy word is very pure; *therefore thy servant loveth it.*”]

2. As a revelation of mercy—

[In this view it is particularly delightful to him. The plan of salvation which it unfolds is so grand, so wonderful, so suitable in all its parts, and so sufficient for all his necessities, that he can never sufficiently admire it — — — It is his meditation, and his song, all the day. The Scripture represents the Gospel as “a feast of fat things, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined:” and such indeed he finds it to his soul. In comparison of it, and of the knowledge of it, he “counts all things in the universe but dross and dung” — — —]

3. As a rule of life—

[From the moment of his having found the way of salvation by a crucified Redeemer, the one desire of his soul has been to “live to Him who died for us and rose again.” “What wilt thou have me to do?” has been his constant inquiry at the throne of grace: and he delights exceedingly in this word as a sure directory under every situation and circumstance of life. From day to day he reads it with this particular view, that he may know “how to walk and to please God.” He perceives that men are always endeavouring to lower the requisitions of this law: but he strives rather to have his attainments raised to that perfect standard. Not one of all its commandments is regarded by him as grievous. Nothing is grievous, but his own want of conformity to them. Could he have his heart’s desire, it would be to “walk in all things as Christ walked,” and to “stand perfect and complete in all the will of God” — — —]

In proportion as this character exists in any, is,

II. The blessedness of those in whom it is found—

This, as might well be expected, is exceeding great. We notice it in two respects;

1. The happiness of their minds—

["Peace," in the Scripture use of the term, is not a mere absence of trouble, but an actual state of very sublime enjoyment. The person "who loves God's law" in the way before described, has, as the very first-fruits of his faith in Christ, *a sense of reconciliation with God*: "being justified by faith, he has peace with God: God has said to him, both by his word and Spirit, "Peace, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee." Combined with this, he has *the testimony of a good conscience*. Though he sees nothing in himself but what furnishes him with grounds for humiliation and self-abasement, he cannot be insensible of the change that has been wrought in him: he dares not deny the work of God in his soul. He has the witness of the Holy Spirit, and the testimony of his own spirit, concurring to assure him, that "old things have passed away within him, and all things become new:" and though he cannot attain that measure of perfection that he aspires after, he is conscious that, if he could, he would be "pure as God is pure," and "perfect as God is perfect." *His daily and hourly employment* brings in an abundance of peace to his soul. He is engaged in doing what he believes to be the will of God; and he finds by sweet experience the truth of that saying, "The work of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness is quietness and assurance for ever^b." Nor has he less comfort in *looking forward to the eternal state*. He is not left to be a prey to fears and apprehensions about his future destiny. He knows in whom he has believed, and that his God and Saviour is able to keep him unto that great and awful day. He sees also, that he has in Christ a right and title to the heavenly inheritance; and that, "when the earthly house of this tabernacle shall be dissolved, he has a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Hence, instead of dreading the approach of death, he looks forward to it as the consummation of all his wishes, and the completion of all his happiness; and "desires to depart, that he may be with Christ." Such is the peace which it is the privilege of all who love the Gospel to enjoy, and which Christ himself has left them as a most invaluable legacy, saying, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you:" and verily it is "a peace which passeth all understanding."]

2. The stability of their goings—

[Those who have not this divine principle within them, are liable to be tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine, and to be "moved from their steadfastness" by every temptation. But not so the true Christian, in whose heart the law of God

^b Isai. xxxii. 17. See also Ps. xix. 11. and Prov. iii. 17.

is engraven. He, though still assaulted with manifold *temptations*, is enabled to withstand them all. At the very moment of the assault, he says, with Joseph, "How shall I do this wickedness, and sin against God?" And throughout the whole course of his life he experiences, on the whole, the truth of that promise, "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." If he be tried with the most formidable *persecutions*, he does not, like the stony-ground hearers, presently desist from following the Lord, but takes up his cross manfully, and makes up his mind to suffer the loss even of life itself, rather than dishonour and deny his Lord. Be his trials ever so numerous, he says concerning them, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto me:" "I am ready, not to be bound only, but also to die, for the Lord's sake." Perhaps one of the greatest stumbling-blocks which lie in the way of the sincere, is *the fall of many who once appeared to run well*. These, in their fall, sweep away, as it were with their tail, many, very many, of the stars of heaven^d. But those who truly love God's law are fixed as the sun in the firmament^e. They know that the truth and excellence of religion does not depend on those who profess it: and therefore, whatever be the conduct of others, he determines, through God's assistance, to hold it fast even to the end. Thus does he surmount the obstacles which sin and Satan place in his way; and is finally "made more than a conqueror through Him that loved him."]

ADDRESS—

1. To those who possess not this character—

[It is indeed a great thing to love God's law. Let not any imagine, that a general approbation of it is that which will either satisfy God, or bring peace into the soul. We love it not aright, if we do not love it *universally*, in every thing that it requires, and *supremely*, above all that the world can give or take away. Nor let any one who does not *thus* love it, expect peace to his soul; for God has said that there is no peace unto him^f: nor can he have stability, seeing that he is in darkness even until now^g. You must inquire for the good old way, and walk therein, if ever you would taste this inestimable blessing^h — — —]

2. To those who, whilst they profess to have attained this character, enjoy not the blessings connected with it—

[God's word is true; nor shall any who trust in it be

^c 1 Cor. x. 13.

^d Rev. xii. 4.

^e Ps. lxxii. 5.

^f Isai. lvii. 20, 21.

^g 1 John ii. 10, 11.

^h Jer. vi. 16.

disappointed of their hope. Hear his sayingsⁱ — — — and, if you experience not the accomplishment of them in your own souls, know that the fault is in yourselves alone. As sure as ever the character is yours, so most assuredly shall the blessedness also be. “He *will* keep his saints” in peace and holiness, even to the end^k.]

ⁱ Ps. xxiii. 1, 2. Jer. xxxi. 9. ^k Isai. xxvi. 3. 1 Sam. ii. 9.

DCCXIV.

SECURITY OF THOSE WHO TRUST IN GOD.

Ps. cxxi. 1—8. *I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is thy keeper: the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in, from this time forth, and even for evermore.*

A LIFE of faith is generally acknowledged to be that which becomes the Christian: but how much is implied in a life of faith is very little considered. The Divine government is too often supposed to extend to great things only: and the idea of referring to God all the little occurrences of every day, is thought by many to be derogatory to his supreme Majesty. But God is to be seen as much in the fall of a sparrow, as in the fall of the greatest empire: and our dependence upon him should extend to every thing without exception. Should we attempt to draw a line between the events to which his attention may be supposed to be directed, and those which may be left, as the expression is, to chance, we should find ourselves utterly at a loss, and, in fact, should soon prove ourselves to be downright Atheists. The Scriptures admit of no such distinction: they ascribe every thing to God: even the events which in some respect owe their origin to Satan, in other points of view are traced up to God himself as their author^a: and one very important use of the Psalms

^a 1 Chron. xxi. 1. with 2 Sam. xxiv. 1.

is, to shew us, how much the habit of referring every thing to God characterizes, composes, and elevates the Christian mind.

In the psalm before us we see this truth exemplified in the experience of David: in illustrating which, we shall notice,

I. The resolution he formed—

The first verse of the psalm is somewhat differently rendered in the margin of our Bibles: “Shall I lift up mine eyes unto the hills? Whence should my help come?” This, whilst it affixes an important sense to the passage, gives it peculiar force and beauty. It represents the Psalmist as expressing his conviction of the utter insufficiency of all earthly powers to assist him, and his determination to confide in God alone. And in this view the passage exactly accords with that declaration of the Church in the prophet Jeremiah, “Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains: truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel^b.”

But as it stands in our translation, it is a resolution of David to look unto Jehovah, who dwelleth on Mount Zion, or rather in the highest heavens, and to trust in him as the one only source of all good. Now this was,

1. A *wise* resolution—

[When our Lord said to his disciples, “Will ye also go away?” Peter replied in the name of all, “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.” In like manner we must ask, To whom can we go for help, except to the Lord our God? No creature can afford us any effectual aid. The creation itself subsists only through the continued agency of Him who first called it into existence, and in all its parts needs the same superintending care that we ourselves do. Whithersoever we turn our eyes for help, every creature uniformly replies, “It is not in me; neither in me.” To look therefore to Jehovah, is our truest, our only, wisdom.]

2. A *pious* resolution—

[A man duly sensible of his dependence on God, abhors the idea of trusting in an arm of flesh. He would not so

^b Jer. iii. 23.

dishonour God ; he would not so invade his unalienable prerogative. He loves the very thought of being a pensioner on the Divine bounty. The habit of committing every concern to God, and of receiving every blessing from God, is truly delightful to him. Hence he says with the church of old, "Ashur shall not save us ; neither will we ride upon horses ; neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods : for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy^c." This is the dictate of true piety : and, whilst it ensures to men a constant communication of all necessary good, it renders every blessing ten-fold more sweet, as coming to them through the special intervention of their heavenly Father.]

3. A *necessary* resolution—

[This state of mind is equally necessary for every child of man. The greatest monarch is as dependent upon God as the lowest person in the universe. No man has any power to secure himself for one single moment : "he is crushed before the moth," if God give it a commission to destroy him. Pharaoh himself was as open to the assault of all the different plagues, and as incapable of removing any one of them, as any of his subjects were. What peace then can any man enjoy, who has no other than a created arm to rest upon ? If we would have any solid comfort in our minds, we must realize a sense of God's superintending care, and rest in him for a supply of every blessing that we stand in need of.]

Having declared his resolution, the Psalmist informs us of,

II. The encouragement given him to persevere in it—

It is worthy of observation, that, after the two first verses of the psalm, David ceases to speak, and is himself addressed by another, who overheard his resolution. And who is it that thus replies to him ? It is no other than God himself ; who immediately replies, in order to shew to the whole universe how pleasing and acceptable to him such a resolution is. Nor are such transitions unusual in the Scriptures : but they deserve especial notice, wherever they occur. We may see a precisely similar passage in the book of the prophet Jeremiah ; where the Lord, having overheard the confessions of his repenting people, instantly takes up the subject, and for their encouragement addresses them in these gracious terms ;

^c Hos. xiv. 3.

“If thou wilt return, O Israel, saith the Lord, return unto me; and I will put thine abominations out of my sight; and thou shalt not remove^d.” The declarations which God here made to David, are equally applicable to all, who, like him, are resolved to live in a state of dependence upon God. Let us consider them,

1. In relation to temporal things—

[All the different expressions which are here used, have an evident reference to what was wrought for Israel during the forty years of their sojourning in the wilderness. The roughness of their untrodden path would often occasion “their feet to slip:” the heat of the sun by day, and the influence of the moon, together with the noxious damps, by night, would greatly molest them in their journey: and their danger from savage beasts or venomous reptiles would tend to keep them in continual alarm. But God promises that no evil shall hurt those who trust in him.

He will be to them an *ever-watchful* helper. Men, be they ever so numerous, may be off their guard: but the Keeper of Israel never will: he never slumbereth nor sleepeth: no enemy can escape his notice; no device be hidden from his view: and his express engagement to his people is, that “no weapon that is formed against them shall prosper^e.”

He will be to them also an *ever-present* helper. The idea of his being “our shade upon our right hand” is exceeding beautiful: for none but those in hot climates can fully conceive the benefit of a shade to protect them from the intense heat of the sun, which not unfrequently strikes persons dead upon the spot. But the expression of being our shade upon our *right* hand probably alludes to the situation of the cloud which attended the Israelites through the wilderness, not only to guide them in their journey, but to shade them by day, and to give them light and warmth also by night. And, as the journey of the Israelites was chiefly in a north-east direction, the cloud which afforded them this shade would be on their *right* hand during the whole of the day. But not to lay any stress on this, the import of the expression obviously is, that, wherever we are open to the assaults of an enemy, God will be ever present to afford us his protection; and that whether we be going out or coming in, we may be assured of his continued and effectual care.

He will yet further be an *all-sufficient* helper. Neither sun nor moon, (which may represent the greatest of created powers,) nor indeed any other being shall hurt us; for “He will preserve us from *all* evil,” and *that*, not for a season only, but “from this time forth, and even for evermore.” To the same effect this

^d Jer. iii. 25. and iv. 1.

^e Isai. liv. 17.

truth is largely declared in the book of Job, in reference to every species of calamity, that it shall not befall any one who trusts in God, or, if it befall him, it shall be overruled for his more abundant good^f. We must doubtless take the promise in this latitude; else it would be contrary to fact and experience: but understood with this limitation, it is, and ever shall be, accomplished in every child of God^g.]

2. In relation to the concerns of the soul—

[It is expressly asserted here, that God will “preserve our souls.” We may be assured therefore, that whatever he does for the body that perishes, shall much more be done for our immortal part. Yes, “he will keep the feet of his saints,” nor shall all the powers, whether of earth or hell, be able to cast them down. “Never will he leave us; never, never forsake us.” Our enemies, it is true, will fight against us to the uttermost: but he will suffer none of them ever to “pluck us out of his hand.” To this extent St. Paul avows his confidence in God^h: and every believer may justly assure himself, that “nothing in heaven, earth, or hell, shall ever separate him from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”]

ADDRESS—

1. To those who have no fears—

[Whence proceeds this? If from confidence in the power and veracity of God, it is well: you are then entitled to cast off all fear; for they who fear Him, have nothing else to fear. But if your want of fear arises, as it too generally does, from an ignorance of your danger, or a confidence in yourselves, you have no reason for self-congratulation: since the greater your fancied security is, the more imminent and awful is your danger. Would you be afraid if you were surrounded by armed hosts that were seeking to destroy you? and will you not be afraid, when Satan himself, that roaring lion, is going about day and night seeking the everlasting destruction of your souls? To continue ignorant of your danger is the readiest way to ensure your everlasting ruin. What if some alarm be occasioned by a sight of your danger? Is it not better to dread the pursuer of blood, than to fall into his hands? Will not your security when you have gained the city of refuge, compensate for the terror that drove you thither? Know then, that if you are yet strangers to a salutary fear, you have yet to learn the true import of a scriptural and saving hope.]

2. To those who are too much under the influence of fear—

^f Job v. 19—23.

^g Isai. xxvii. 3.

^h Rom. viii. 35—39. with 2 Tim. ii. 18.

[You should never forget what an Almighty Friend you have. How many times in this psalm are you reminded, that the LORD, even the Almighty God, is your helper and deliverer! Were he less powerful, or less vigilant, or less worthy of credit, you might well fear. But what ground can *he* have for fear, who has God himself for his refuge? O! learn to say with David, "The Lord is my strength and my salvation; whom then shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" I ask not from whence your dangers or your fears arise: for, if they were a thousand times greater and better founded than they are, this one answer were sufficient to remove them all, "If God be for you, who can be against you?" Only rely on God, and you are safe. See how tenderly he chides your unbelieving fearsⁱ. If under any circumstances you are tempted to indulge an unbelieving fear, check yourselves instantly, as David did; and say with him, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God^k."]]

ⁱ Isai. xl. 27—31.^k Ps. xlii. 11.

DCCXV.

THANKSGIVING FOR GREAT DELIVERANCE.

Ps. cxxiv. 1—8. *If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, now may Israel say; If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when men rose up against us: then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us: then the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul: then the proud waters had gone over our soul. Blessed be the Lord, who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth. Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped. Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.*^a

THE Psalmist, after some great deliverance either from foreign enemies or civil insurrection, records, for the instruction and encouragement of the Church in all ages, the goodness of God towards him. The precise occasion on which it was penned, is not known. Instead therefore of dwelling on historical events, which, as applied to the psalm, must be at

^a This Psalm is with peculiar propriety read on *the fifth of November*. This small sketch is inserted merely as a sketch, to shew in how small a space a sermon may be contained. The Discourse that follows it was the one used on the occasion.

best conjectural, we shall take occasion from the psalm to set before you, in reference to the solemnities of this day,

I. Matter for devout acknowledgment—

[To illustrate this, two things are to be considered;

1. Our danger; which, like that alluded to in the psalm itself, has been *imminent*^b — — — *irresistible*^c — — — *tremendous*^d — — —

2. Our deliverance; which, like that which is here celebrated, has been *sudden*^e — — — and *effectual*^f — — —]

II. Our duty arising from it—

[This is comprised in two things;

1. Gratitude. The language of all our hearts should be, “Blessed be the Lord^g” — — —

2. Affiance. We should in all future difficulties hope and trust in God as our almighty Protector^h — — —]

APPLICATION—

[However thankful we may be for our national mercies, we must not forget, that there is yet more abundant cause for joy on account of our deliverance from sin and Satan, death and hell, through the mediation and intercession of the Lord Jesus Christ — — — Let the greatness of our danger, and the perfection of our deliverance, be the subject of our daily contemplations, that we may trust in Jesus with our whole hearts, and praise him with our whole souls — — —]

^b The number of our enemies (like a flood, ver. 4, 5.) their invertecy against us (ver. 3.) and the combination of circumstances at the time of the mutiny in the fleet, well illustrate this.

^c What if God had not been so decidedly for us (mark the repetition, ver. 1, 2.) in some of our naval engagements? If only *half* of our victories had terminated as much in favour of the enemy, how different would have been our state, especially when all Europe was combined against us!

^d Torn in pieces (ver. 6.) and swallowed up (ver. 3—5.)

^e Review the changes in the North; and our escape is indeed like that of a bird that gets out after having been already caught in the fowler's net, ver. 7.

^f Peace is established; and the snare itself (the principles which occasioned the war) is broken. ver. 7. Written Oct. 1801.

^g ver. 6.

^h ver. 8.

DCCXVI.

GOD TO BE ACKNOWLEDGED IN OUR MERCIES.

Ps. cxxiv. 1—8. *If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, now may Israel say; if it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when men rose up against us: then they had*

swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us: then the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul: then the proud waters had gone over our soul. Blessed be the Lord, who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth. Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped. Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

ON what occasion this psalm was written, we are not informed: but in the title it is ascribed to David: and no period in his history suits it better than the time of Absalom's rebellion, when, but for God's interposition, in defeating the counsel of Ahithophel, the banished monarch and his adherents must all have perished.

But as there is no period fixed, it will be needless to enter into a consideration of any circumstances as connected with the psalm, since all that we should say could rest on no better foundation than conjecture. Of course, if we apply the psalm to the circumstances of our own nation at the present time^a, we shall not be understood as intimating that there was any such reference intended by the Psalmist, but merely as accommodating the general expressions of it to our own particular case: and truly we must say, that if they had originally been penned for the occasion, they could not be more suited to it than they are.

Two things then we would lead you to consider:

- I. The great deliverances which we are now met to celebrate—

During this long and bloody war, several occasions have arisen wherein we have experienced the most signal deliverance. We will call your attention to a few: we have been saved, almost by miracle, from,

1. The revolutionary principles—

[In our own nation, as well as on the continent, there was a general outcry about liberty and equality; and multitudes in every rank of life united their efforts to overthrow the Constitution of this country, and to establish a democracy in the land. Even pious people in vast numbers were carried away by the delusive idea of ameliorating the condition of the lower

^a Oct. 1814.

classes of society, and lent their aid to others who aimed at nothing less than the utter subversion of the Government. But through the energy of our king, and of those who administered his government, God in his infinite mercy preserved us : and we have lived to see the day when almost all who were so deluded have seen their error, and been led to regard the constitution of this country as the most perfect of any upon earth.]

2. The mutiny of the fleet—

[Time was, when the dissatisfaction so industriously cherished and diffused by traitors within our own bosom, and spread, by means of corresponding committees, over the whole land, had reached even that class of men who in all former ages had been the boast and glory of their country, the sailors in our fleet. Many of these broke forth into open mutiny, and threatened to carry our ships, which were the bulwark of the nation, to the ports of our enemies. Such a blow as that would have destroyed us utterly : but the same kind Providence which had watched over us on so many other occasions, interposed to rescue us from the impending calamity, and to restore amongst our fleet that union and energy which have rendered it triumphant in every quarter of the globe.]

3. The threatened invasion—

[What immense preparations were made by our enemies to invade us, and what little preparation there was on our part to oppose them, cannot have escaped from our remembrance. True it is, that we were powerful by sea ; and that consideration it was which kept the enemy in check : but had not their forces been called off to other encounters, there can be no doubt but that they would have attempted to invade us ; and, if they had succeeded in landing only two thirds of the forces which they might have brought against us, there can be no doubt but that they would have seized and plundered the metropolis, and spread desolation and misery over the whole country. We all know what destruction they threatened us with^b ; and, could they have once overrun our country, they would have reduced us to such a state of subjection as Israel experienced, when the Philistines suffered them not even to retain a workman in their land, who should be able to fabricate arms for their defence. Not a dock, or a naval architect, would have been left in our land.]

4. The overthrow of the Russian empire—

[Already had the whole of Europe been combined against us, and we were constrained to array ourselves against their united force. But the insatiable ambition of our great enemy raised up opposition at last from amongst his own allies, and gave us an opportunity of engaging him in a foreign land,

^b “ Delenda est Carthago ! ” was their universal cry.

instead of having to contend with him on our own soil. Still however we must have fallen before him, had not his insupportable despotism goaded to resistance the Russian monarch. But at one time, even that event also appeared to have prepared for us a more complete destruction. But God suffered the proud oppressor madly to protract his stay amongst the ruins of Moscow, till a retreat became extremely difficult. Hence arose defeat: the severity of the climate, and the extraordinary energy of the Russian armies, soon dissipated the forces of our enemy; and enabled many who had been compelled to fight under his banners, to turn their arms against him, and to seek the recovery of their former independence. Yet, after all, if the last great battle had not been decided in favour of the allied armies, our enemy might still have retrieved his former losses, and again forged chains for the whole civilized world. But the time was come for God to have mercy on us; and he has had mercy beyond all that could possibly have been expected: he has trodden down the oppressor, as the mire in the streets; and has restored peace amongst all the contending nations, even such a peace as the world never saw before; a peace cemented by universal harmony and love.]

Let us then, instead of contemplating our mercies only, proceed to consider,

II. The duty of acknowledging God in them—

In the psalm before us, all the success is ascribed to God alone: God's gracious agency is acknowledged to have been the sole cause of Israel's preservation^c; for this his name is humbly and gratefully adored^d; and he is declared to be henceforth the only hope of his people^e. In like manner should we acknowledge him in all the mercies which we now celebrate: for,

1. They do all in reality proceed from him—

[We are by no means disposed to withhold our tribute of praise from those who have been the instruments of our deliverance. Those who have been at the helm of our affairs have certainly laid their plans with consummate wisdom; and our forces both by sea and land have carried them into execution with extraordinary energy. But still, without the Divine blessing their united efforts, however great, would have failed. It is God alone who inspired them either with wisdom or courage; and he alone who gave success to their endeavours. We are assured that even the ploughman and the thresher derive all their skill from him^f; how much more then the governors of nations, and the conductors of fleets and armies! The

^c ver. 1, 2. ^d ver. 6. ^e ver. 8. ^f Isai. xxviii. 26—29.

victories of Cyrus were, as much as any could be, the result of human energy; because God was not known either to him or to his people: but God tells us, that HE, even HE alone, gave him success^g. In like manner it is HE, and HE alone, who has conducted us in safety through all our troubles, and brought them at last to such a happy issue. That we should see and acknowledge this, is of infinite importance; because God is “a jealous God, who will not give his glory to another,” or endure that we should “sacrifice to our own drag, and burn incense to our own net.” Hear with what earnestness he cautioned the Jews against this great impiety^h; and let us learn with all possible care to avoid it: let us bear in mind that it is God alone “who maketh wars to cease, and breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder, and burneth the chariot in the fireⁱ,” and that, as there is not evil, so neither is there good, in the city, which is not the work of his hands.^k]

2. The acknowledging of him in them gives us the truest enjoyment of them—

[Others may indulge in carnal mirth; but their joy will expire “as the crackling of thorns under a pot;” and no solid benefit will accrue to their souls. But if we view God in our mercies, they will lead our affections heavenwards; they will tend to abase us in the dust for our own unworthiness, and to magnify in our estimation the goodness of God, who has done such great things for us. Compare these feelings with those which the ungodly experience on such occasions; how pure, how elevating, how abiding! We may see the conduct of the ungodly strikingly exemplified by the Amalekites after they had invaded and plundered Ziklag: “they were spread abroad upon all the earth, eating, and drinking, and dancing, because of the great spoil that they had taken^l.” On the other hand, we may behold in Israel the conduct of the godly, singing praises unto God, and glorifying him for all the wonders he had wrought for them at the Red Sea; “Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders^m?” Can we doubt which of the two had the richer enjoyment of their prosperity? Let us then imitate the pious Israelites: yea, let us contemplate, like David, every occurrence whereby God has manifested his care over us; and let us, in reference to every one of them, say, “His mercy endureth for ever; his mercy endureth for everⁿ.”]

3. A view of him in these his providential mercies will encourage us to apply to him for the blessings of his grace—

^g Isai. xlv. 1—7. ^h Deut. viii. 11—17. ⁱ Ps. xlvi. 9, 10.

^k Amos. iii. 6. ^l 1 Sam. xxx. 16.

^m See Exod. xv. 1—11.

ⁿ See Ps. cxxxvi.

[Great as the dangers were from which Israel had been delivered by the interpositions of their God, they were not a whit greater than those to which we are exposed every day and hour. Truly we have a sea of difficulties ready to overwhelm us: we have a roaring lion seeking to devour us; and a subtle enemy ready to take us in his snares. And who, but God, can deliver us? Who can hope to escape from so great perils, if God himself be not on his side? Truly, “our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth,” and in his name alone. Where is there one of us, who, when he considers the number and power of his spiritual enemies, has not reason to say, “Blessed be the Lord, who hath not given me as a prey to their teeth?” Sure we are, that there is not a believer amongst us, who does not view himself as “a brand plucked out of the burning,” and marvel at the grace that has been magnified towards him in the redemption of his soul.

Now then let those who have not yet experienced this mercy, consider how gracious God has been to our guilty land, and what an amazing deliverance he has vouchsafed to us: and let them say within themselves, “Will God be less gracious to my soul?” Has he not assured me, that “he willeth not the death of any sinner;” that “he will cast out none who come to him in the name of Jesus;” and that, if I make my requests known to him, he will fill me with “a peace that passeth all understanding?” O let us put this matter to a trial; let us see whether or not he is “rich in mercy unto all that call upon him.” Beloved Brethren, the time is short: there are yet but a few more months or years, perhaps but a few more days or hours, before the day of salvation will be closed. We would earnestly wish, that, at the moment of your departure hence, you should be able to look back on all the dangers you have escaped, and with triumphant exultation adopt the language of the psalm before us. Certainly, as many of us as shall be saved at last, will instantly, on their entrance into the eternal world, begin the song of the redeemed, and sing, “Salvation to God and to the Lamb for ever and ever!” Now then seek to have the Lord on your side: beg him to strengthen you against all the evils of your own hearts; to rescue you from the impending storms of a tumultuous world; and to deliver you from all the deceit and violence of your great adversary. So shall you have peace with God in your own conscience; and in due season enter into that rest, where neither sin nor sorrow shall ever assault you more.º]

º The author was not aware that he had written on this subject before. But as the former Skeleton consists of only a single page, and this goes over such different ground, particularly in shewing how to improve national mercies, he has thought it not improper to print this also.

DCCXVII.

TRUST IN THE LORD.

Ps. cxxv. 1, 2. *They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people, from henceforth even for ever.*

IN forming our estimate of men, we are apt to look at their actions only; and even our own characters, also, we try by that standard. But it is the habit of the mind that chiefly marks the man; and by that we shall be estimated at the tribunal of our God. Doubtless actions are important, as indicative of principles from whence they flow; and by them, *we*, who can only see the external fruits, are constrained to judge of the quality of the root from whence they proceed. But the heart-searching God looks at the root itself; and approves or disapproves of men according to the real quality and habit of their minds.

In reading the words before us, we might estimate at a low rate the character here designated, did we not analyze the terms by which that character is described. But, if we take sufficient pains to explore the import of the words, and the true nature of the grace which they delineate, we shall see that the person “who trusts in the Lord” is a very exalted character, and that the blessedness here accorded to him is precisely such as becomes a holy God to confer upon him.

Let us consider,

I. The character here described—

“Trust in the Lord” does not import a mere general acknowledgment of God as the Governor of the universe: it implies incomparably more, even a deep conviction of his special providence, and of his incessant attention to every the minutest concern of his own peculiar people. It implies, I say, this conviction,

1. In our views—

[Let it be considered what *trust* is. It of necessity imports some engagement on the part of him in whom that trust

is reposed. Consequently, a general notion of God's ordering all things according to the counsel of his own will, however deep that conviction be, will not amount to the grace that is here described. The devils possess that conviction, in its utmost possible extent; but they cannot *trust* in God, because they have no promise given them, nor any ground whatever to hope that he will ever interpose in their favour. The person who trusts in the Lord must see him as a Covenant-God in Christ Jesus, engaged to accomplish for his chosen people all that their necessities can require — — —]

2. In our habits—

[With such views of the Deity must be united a total renunciation of every other hope, and a committing of all our concerns to him, for body and for soul, for time and for eternity. There must be a going forth of the soul to him in prayer; a spreading of our wants before him; and a declared alliance in his great and precious promises. Viewing him as both a God of providence and of grace, we must fully expect his attention to our every request, to order every thing for our good, and to save us in Christ Jesus with an everlasting salvation. Our expectations must be co-extensive with his engagements: and, as he has engaged to “be a God unto us,” we must expect from him all that unerring wisdom, unbounded power, unsearchable love, and unchanging faithfulness, can effect — — — This is, in fact, what the Apostle elsewhere calls “the life of faith in the Son of God;” and nothing short of this will answer the character in my text. But, wherever this is, there shall also be,]

II. The privileges connected with it—

There shall be,

1. Stability—

[Mount Zion was a place of so much strength, that, from the days of Joshua to the time of David, the Israelites could never take it. They occupied Jerusalem: but Mount Zion was too strong for them; insomuch that the Jebusites who inhabited it laughed them to scorn, vaunting, that if there were none left but blind and lame to defend the fortress, the Jews should never be able to prevail against it^a. But far more impregnable is the fortress in which *they* dwell who trust in the Lord: “The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth to it, and is safe^b.” They may be assaulted both by men and devils; but they are assured, that “God will keep them by his own power, through faith, unto everlasting salvation^c.” They are in the Saviour's hands; and he has pledged himself that “none shall ever pluck them out of his

^a 2 Sam. v. 6—8.

^b Prov. xviii. 10.

^c 1 Pet. i. 5.

hands^d." In themselves they remain weak as ever, as both David and Peter have clearly shewn; but in Christ they are strong: and in the Covenant which is made with them in Christ, and "which is ordered in all things and sure," it is engaged, on the part of God, that they shall never be moved, and that "the gates of hell shall never prevail against them^e."

2. Protection—

[The hills that were round about Jerusalem protected it on every side; so that the Romans, it was confessed, would not have been able to subdue it, if the garrison themselves had not madly assisted them by their mutual contentions. But far more effectually does the Lord protect his people, being to them "a wall of fire round about them^f;" a wall which will not only ward off the assaults of their enemies, but will itself destroy their assailants. In fact, "he keeps them even as the apple of his eye^g:" and "sooner shall the ordinances of heaven and earth pass away, and the foundations of the world be searched out," than any one of them shall be left to perish^h. To assure them of this, "he has confirmed his covenant with an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, they might have strong consolationⁱ;" and live "assured that nothing shall ever separate them from his love^k."]

To all of you, then, I SAY,

1. Get just views of your God and Saviour—

[Be not satisfied with a general acknowledgment of him; but study his nature as revealed in the inspired volume, and acquaint yourselves with his dispensations as exhibited in the sacred records. See him delivering his people Israel out of Egypt, and supporting them in the wilderness, and establishing them in the land of Canaan; and then rest assured, that he is the same God, alike powerful, alike gracious, and alike faithful to all his engagements — — —]

2. Let your expectations from him be to the utmost extent of your necessities—

[There should be no limit to them, provided only they do not contravene the Lord's will, and tend to the subversion of his glory. "However wide you open your mouth, he will fill it;" and however "large your desires be, he will fulfil them^l." Listen not, under any circumstances, to flesh and blood, like Asa, who in his sickness sought to the physicians: but even though sense should stand in direct opposition to faith, as in Abraham's call to sacrifice his son Isaac, "be strong in

^d John x. 28, 29.

^e Matt. xvi. 18.

^f Zech. ii. 5.

^g Deut. xxxii. 10.

^h Jer. xxxi. 35—37. and Isai. liv. 9, 10.

ⁱ Heb. vi. 17, 18.

^k Rom. viii. 34—39.

^l Ps. cxlv. 19.

faith, giving glory to your God^m." Your divine Master, who has engaged himself for you, would have you to "be without carefulness." His command is, "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication let your requests be made known unto God; and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesusⁿ." Only "cast your care thus on him," and you will soon know, by sweet experience, the force of that appeal which David made to the all-seeing God; "O Lord God of Hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee^o!"]

^m Rom. iv. 20.

ⁿ Phil. iv. 6, 7.

^o Ps. lxxxiv. 12.

DCCXVIII.

THE UPRIGHT AND APOSTATES CONTRASTED.

Ps. cxxv. 4, 5. *Do good, O Lord, unto those that be good, and to them that are upright in their hearts. As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, the Lord shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity: but peace shall be upon Israel.*

AT the commencement of this psalm, the inspired writer speaks of the Lord's people as secured both by the providence and grace of God. And it is further promised, in the verse before my text, that their trials shall not prevail beyond their strength^a. But no exemption from trouble is promised them. It is taken for granted, that "the rod of the wicked shall fall upon them, though it shall not rest upon them." The wrath of man, like water turned upon a mill, shall come on them with no more force than shall be sufficient for accomplishing God's gracious purposes on their souls: the rest, however menacing its power may be, shall be made to pass off by an opened sluice^b. Nevertheless, the trouble shall be sufficient to try every man, and to prove the truth and measure of his integrity; the man who fairly meets and stands the trial, being approved, whilst he who sinks under it, or shuns it, shall be deemed altogether unworthy of the Divine favour. Hence the Psalmist pours out his fervent intercession in behalf of the upright, and at the same time warns every man of the danger of declension from the ways of God. The two points for our consideration are,

^a Compare ver. 3. with 1 Cor. x. 13.

^b Ps. lxxvi. 10.

I. His encouragement to the upright—

His prayer shews what every believing soul may expect at the hands of God—

[No one, without constant supplies of grace and strength, would be able to endure the trials with which he will be visited in the path of duty. A man's uprightness may embolden him to ask for divine assistance; but it can never support him without it. The greatest and best of men are weak, even as others, if for a moment they be left to themselves. Hezekiah was in some respects as eminent for piety as any of the kings of Israel^c: but, when "God left him to try him," he fell^d. Even Abraham and Isaac shewed themselves weak in the day of trial; each of them denying his wife, and Abraham repeatedly, through fear of the consequences which an acknowledgment of the truth might bring upon them. The Psalmist therefore prays, "Do good unto them, O Lord;" supply every one of them with that measure of strength which their necessities may require; and uphold them under all the circumstances to which they may be reduced! — — —]

In fact, the prayer contains nothing which God himself has not made the subject of a direct promise—

[With all his believing people God has made an everlasting covenant, that "He will not turn away from them to do them good;" yea, "that he will rejoice over them to do them good," and assuredly interest himself in their behalf, "with his whole heart, and with his whole soul^e." God considers his own glory as engaged for his people: and sooner shall heaven and earth pass away, than one who is truly upright in heart be ever left by him to perish^f. The good he designs them may not be of the precise nature that they desire or expect; (as Paul had not "the thorn in his flesh" removed, but grace given him to sustain it:) but, that which is really best shall be vouchsafed unto them; and it shall be imparted to them in the time, and manner, and measure, that unerring wisdom sees to be best for them^g.]

With his tender concern for the upright, we see combined,

II. His warning to the unstable—

As for open apostates, no one can doubt their fate; "their last end will be worse than their beginning^h." But there are many who secretly decline from God's

^c 2 Kings xviii. 5.

^d 2 Chron. xxxii. 31.

^e Jer. xxxii. 40, 41.

^f Ps. lxxxiv. 11.

^g Their extremity shall be God's opportunity. See Isai. lviii. 10, 11.

^h 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21.

holy ways, who yet think that, because they turn not back to open profaneness, they shall "escape the judgment of God." Now,

These are the persons warned—

[“The man who puts his hand to the plough, is not to *look back*,” lest the furrows which he makes disgrace the field¹. So “those who turn aside unto their crooked paths” are persons who, by *crooked policy* and *undue compliances*, are labouring to avert the evils which a bold and steadfast conduct would bring upon them — — — Such was the conduct of Peter, when, for the sake of pacifying the Judaizing teachers, he constrained the Gentiles to conform to the Mosaic ritual: and had not the reproof which Paul administered to him, in the presence of the whole Galatian Church, produced the desired change, this temporizing Apostle would have destroyed his own soul, and the souls of all his followers. In matters of minor importance we may yield, for the sake of peace, as Paul himself did when he became a Nazarite: but in matters which will in any degree impeach our fidelity to God, “we must not give place, no, not for an hour.” To benefit others, we may yield: to screen ourselves, we must not yield. Not life itself must be held dear, when an adherence to duty calls for the sacrifice of it.]

Those only who are “upright” will have peace at the last—

[Those who dissemble with God, and are diverted from the paths of righteousness by that “fear of man which bringeth a snare,” have no real peace in this life^k: for there can be no peace where there is not “the testimony of a good conscience.” Much less can there be peace in a dying hour, and in the near prospect of giving up our account to God. But, if we suppose a man to have deceived himself so far as to have prevented any remonstrances from his own conscience, still, the very instant that he shall be summoned into the presence of his God, his delusions will be all dispelled, and he will see himself even as God sees him. Where will his peace *then* be? Alas! it will be fled for ever: for in that day none but the true Israel will be approved of their God. All the rest, how specious soever may have been their conduct, “will be led forth with the workers of iniquity,” and take their portion with the most abandoned of the human race. In fact, the portion of hypocrites is declared to be pre-eminently bitter¹, because of the light they have resisted, and the dissimulation they have practised. Let the unstable then know this, and avail themselves of the warning thus given them.]

¹ Luke ix. 62.

^k Isai. lix. 8.

¹ Matt. xxiv. 51.

Then let every one SEE, and be convinced of,

1. The importance of uprightness—

[None but the upright in heart can expect any “good” at the hands of God. “As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways,” “their own wickedness shall correct them, and their backslidings reprove them^m.” Then only can we be approved of our God, when our heart is right with God. For “the hypocrites in heart heap up wrath;” and will surely perish, under an accumulated weight of misery.]

2. The necessity of decision—

[It should never admit of one moment’s doubt, whom we shall serve. Nothing must be suffered to stand in competition with God’s revealed will. Sufferings are to be only as the dust upon the balance. So, also, must gains be counted but loss by us, if we would approve ourselves to God. Let us, then, ever be ready to answer our opponents, as the Apostles did: “Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye:” for we cannot but obey him at all events, and execute his will, though every man on earth, and every wicked spirit in hell, should combine against us. We will, God helping us, be faithful unto death: for then, and then only, can we have any scriptural hope of obtaining eternal life.]

^m Jer. ii. 19.

DCCXIX.

DELIVERANCE FROM SPIRITUAL BONDAGE ACKNOWLEDGED.

Ps. cxxvi. 1—4. *When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The Lord hath done great things for them. The Lord hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad. Turn again our captivity, O Lord, as the streams in the south.*

THE great body of the Psalms was composed by David: but some were written many hundred years before his time, as the 90th was by Moses; and others many hundred years after him, as that before us, which was evidently written after the Babylonish captivity. It relates in the first instance to the delivery of Israel from their sore bondage, and their restoration to their long desolated country: but it is well applicable to that redemption which is

vouchsafed to the souls of men, and which was shadowed forth by that great event.

Let us consider from the passage,

I. The deliverance here celebrated—

Grievous beyond expression was Israel's captivity. They were treated with the utmost cruelty by their Babylonish oppressors^a; and their sufferings were greatly heightened by the derision with which their pious lamentations were regarded^b. But in proportion to the greatness of their afflictions was their joy at the unexpected deliverance vouchsafed to them. Observe,

1. The feelings excited by it—

[Among *the captives themselves* the joy was so great, that they scarcely knew whether it were a reality or a dream. They were like Peter, when delivered from prison by an angel on the very night previous to his intended execution: "He went out and followed the angel; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision^c." All their lamentations were instantly turned to joy: "their mouth was filled with laughter, and their tongue with singing." The sight of such an unprecedented event filled all *the surrounding nations* with astonishment, and constrained them to acknowledge that it was the work, not of man, but of God: "Then said they among the heathen, The Lord hath done great things for them." The Israelites themselves readily concurred in this sentiment; and, on hearing the congratulations offered them, thankfully replied, "The LORD hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad."]

2. The supplications it drew forth—

[Though permission was given them to return to their own land, and every thing was provided for their sustenance by the way, and their assistance at the end of their journey, the Jews saw that there was a great and discouraging work before them: but, as nothing was impossible to Jehovah, they entreated him to perfect what he had begun, and "to turn again their captivity as the streams in the south." In the southern or hilly country of Judea there were, as in all mountainous countries, frequent and sudden inundations; which however as rapidly subsided, soon after the rains had ceased; so that, where, but a few hours before, the country bore the aspect of universal desolation, it speedily assumed the most lovely and flourishing

^a Ps. cxxxvii. 8, 9.

^b Ps. cxxxvii. 3, 4.

^c Acts xii. 9.

appearance, the valleys smiling on every side with renovated and augmented verdure. Thus the Jews desired, that the ravages made in their now desolated country might be soon repaired, and that, through the influence of their almighty Guardian, their efforts might be crowned with speedy and complete success.]

We forbear to dwell upon the event itself, that we may enter somewhat minutely into,

II. The more glorious deliverance that was typified by it—

The event before us is undoubtedly to be regarded as shadowing forth that infinitely greater deliverance which is wrought for us by the Lord Jesus Christ^d. And the correspondence between the two is particularly striking. Observe,

1. The deliverance itself—

[Grievous as was the captivity of the Jews in Babylon, it was nothing in comparison of that sorer bondage to which we are subjected by the power of sin and the wiles of Satan. All indeed have not the same work assigned them; but all are walking after the imagination of their own hearts, “being taken in the snare of the devil, and led captive by him at his will.”

The promised Deliverer however has arrived; has entered into the conflict with our great adversary, and utterly subdued him. Jesus, foretold by name hundreds of years before his advent in the flesh, has accomplished the work for which he was raised up: and, having now “ascended up on high and led captivity captive,” he has sent his heralds to “proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.” This is the very first use he makes of his newly-acquired power. Nor is it an empty proclamation, without any facilities afforded for carrying his gracious purposes into effect: he gives us back for the use and honour of Jehovah all those vessels of which we had been despoiled, and which, though originally formed for the service of God alone, have, through the influence of our great adversary, been prostituted and debased to the vilest uses: yes, all our faculties and powers are now restored by him to their proper office; and the all-sufficient aid of his Spirit is promised to us throughout all our dreary pilgrimage. Our almighty Deliverer has gone further still, and issued his commands to all throughout his vast empire, to succour us in our work, and to impart to us whatsoever we may stand in need of^e: the very angels in heaven are enjoined to attend us in all our way, to encamp round about us, to hold

^d Compare Isai. xl. 3—5. with Luke iii. 3—6. or Isai. lii. 7. with Rom. x. 15.

^e Ezra i. 1—11.

us up lest at any time we dash our foot against a stone, and to minister to us in all that our necessities may require.

All this too is offered to us as a free act of mercy on the part of our great Deliverer. It was one of the most extraordinary parts of the Jews' deliverance from Babylon, that Cyrus should liberate them without any remuneration: but how does it exalt beyond all estimate the value of our redemption, that it is offered to us freely, "without money and without price!"]

2. The effects produced by it—

[When first a soul that has been sinking under a load of sin and guilt is made to hear the tidings of a free and full deliverance, they seem to him "as an idle tale:" he can scarcely believe it possible that such mercy should be vouchsafed to *him*, and that one who has been all his days a willing captive should be delivered: and, when the joys of this salvation burst upon his soul, he appears to himself to be, as it were, in a dream; so far does the deliverance exceed all that he could previously have conceived. Then his mouth, which was but lately filled with lamentations and complaints, is "filled with laughter, and his tongue with singing"^f — — — Nor is the surprise confined to him alone: his friends and neighbours behold with astonishment the change that has taken place in him: they now see the whole course of his life changed: they behold the chains with which he was tied and bound, now loosed; the sins that once had dominion over him, now mortified; and the griefs, which they interpreted as symptoms or forerunners of derangement, now turned to joy, and "thanksgiving and the voice of melody." So great is the change in *their* eyes, that though they love it not, they are constrained to admire it, and to acknowledge the hand of God in it; "The Lord hath done great things for them:" and, though they may deride it in public, they envy in their hearts the lot which they affect to despise. As for those who experience the happy change, they thankfully adore their heavenly Benefactor; "The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad!" — — — They take their harps that have been so long suspended on the willows, and sing with inexpressible delight the songs of Zion.

But the more they have experienced, the more they desire to possess all the fulness of the blessings prepared for them. Gladly would they, if it were possible, have all the remains of sin purged out from their hearts, and all conflicts with it for ever terminated. They pant for the full attainment of the Divine image; and cry with fervour to their God, "Turn again our captivity, O Lord, as the streams in the south!" Still however, not discouraged by the length of their journey, or the difficulties to be surmounted, or the toils which they must undergo,

^f Isai. xxxv. 10.

before they shall attain the full object of their desires, they set out in humble dependence on their God, assured of final and complete success. They are willing to “sow in tears, confident that in due time they shall reap in joy.”]

ADDRESS—

1. To those who have experienced some measure of this deliverance—

[You have heard the parallel drawn between the deliverance of the Jews from Babylon, and that of which you are the happy subjects. It remains for you to carry it yet further, and to realize it in its utmost extent. Of all the multitudes who set out on their journey towards Zion, there was not one who was not sensible of the cruel bondage from which he had been delivered; not one who did not feel his obligations to Cyrus as his great deliverer; not one, who did not see that his provision by the way, and his succours at the close of his journey, were the fruits of that same grace that first proclaimed the deliverance: moreover, all of them without exception would feel a consciousness that they were not yet arrived at the place which their souls longed after; but that they were daily proceeding towards it: they felt no inclination to rest satisfied with any thing they met with in the wilderness; but looked forward to the enjoyment of God's ordinances in Jerusalem as the consummation of their bliss. Now then let it be so with you. Never for a moment lose the remembrance of your former captivity, or of your obligations to the Lord Jesus Christ, who “by his own death has destroyed death, and him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and hath delivered those who through fear of death were all their life-time subject to bondage.” Never for a moment forget that you are on a journey towards Zion, and that all your fresh springs are in that adorable Saviour, who has redeemed you by his blood. Never for a moment cease to press forward in your heavenly way; but, forgetting what is behind, reach forward, like coursers, to the destined goal. Let all your hopes, and all your happiness be in heaven. In a word, *be exactly in the state and habit of your minds, what the liberated captives were in their journey towards Zion.* Then will you have attained the perfection of Christian pilgrims, and will in due time possess in all its fulness your destined inheritance.]

2. To those who are yet the bond-slaves of sin and Satan—

[This is the state of every man by nature. It is to little purpose to say, that we are not addicted to any gross iniquity; for “the whole world lieth in wickedness,” or, “in the wicked one:” and if the Captain of our Salvation have not rescued us from the hands of “the strong man armed,” our very peace is a

sufficient evidence of our bondage. If you are yet strangers to the experience above described, you are yet in bondage to the great enemy of Zion — — —

But we are authorized to declare that this adversary is cast down; that our Cyrus has prevailed over him; and that liberty is now given to every captive in Babylon to return to Zion. Behold, as a herald of our adorable Saviour, I now announce to you these glad tidings. O! be ye not like too many of that ill-fated nation, who preferred their ease to toils, their bondage to liberty, their dwellings in Babylon to their inheritance in Jerusalem.

Put yourselves under the guidance of the true Zerubbabel, before whom "the mountains shall become a plain." If you meet with difficulties, know that HE has issued his proclamation to all his creatures, to afford you all necessary aid: and if, instead of aiding, they endeavour to obstruct you, he has engaged that all things shall work together for your good. Come out then from Babylon, every one of you; and let this be the one harmonious proposal of you all, "Come, let us go up to Zion, unto the Lord our God." Fear not but that the object, when attained, will richly recompense all the difficulties of your way. Even in this world your "joys shall be unspeakable and glorified:" but who can conceive the joy that awaits you in the Zion above? How will your mouth *then* be filled with laughter, and your tongue with singing! How will you then, in concert with all the heavenly hosts, exclaim, "The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad!" Be content then to "go on your way weeping, bearing precious seed, knowing assuredly that at last you shall come again with rejoicing, bearing your sheaves with you."]

DCCXX.

SOWING IN TEARS.

Ps. cxxvi. 5. *They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.*

THIS seems to be a general truth founded on the experience of those who returned from the Babylonish captivity, and the correspondent experience of all who return from the bondage of sin and Satan. The Israelites, like Peter liberated from his prison, were so astonished at their deliverance, that it seemed to them more like a dream than a reality. The very heathens themselves wondered at it, and ascribed it to the influence of Jehovah, as also the Israelites did with joy and gratitude, taking occasion from it to implore the speedy and perfect restoration of all their

tribes^a. Such also are the wonder and joy occasioned by the conversion of a soul to God; and such are the desires which instantly vent themselves in fervent petitions for complete deliverance. But as among the captive Jews, so in the enslaved soul, a season of sorrow precedes the time of emancipation. Nevertheless it shall be found universally true, that they who sow in tears shall reap in joy.

Let us inquire,

I. What we are to understand by sowing in tears?

“The sorrow of the world worketh death;” and therefore cannot be that to which the promise is made. To sow in tears implies,

1. A painful recollection of past sins—

[We all are sinners from our earliest youth: and every sin we have ever committed, is as fresh in the remembrance of the Deity as if it had been committed this very hour. Nor should we think the less of our sins because they have been long passed: on the contrary, we should view them with all the shame and sorrow that they excited in our bosoms the very instant that our consciences first accused us. Like God’s people of old, we should be bowed down greatly in the recollection of them^b, and earnestly entreat, with David, that God would not call us into judgment for them^c.]

2. A penitent concern for present infirmities—

[The very best of men has much within him to mourn over. It is but in part that any of us are renewed. Many are the corruptions that yet work within us; and the very imperfection of our prayers and praises is enough to make us go mourning all the day long. St. Paul found so much conflict in his soul by reason of his indwelling corruptions that he exclaimed, “O wretched man that I am^d!” and groaned earnestly for death as the season when he should be freed from all the imperfections of his nature, and serve, as well as enjoy, God with unabated ardour^e. Thus should we also “go softly before God in the bitterness of our souls^f,” and lothe ourselves before him in dust and ashes^g.]

^a Ver. 1—4. The rain which descended in torrents on the southern or hilly country of Judea, often filled the vallies with rapid streams, which quickly passing away as soon as the rain ceased, the rivers were suddenly transformed into verdant fields. Thus sudden and perfect the Israelites desired their restoration to be.

^b Ps. xxxviii. 3—8. Jer. xxxi. 19. and iii. 25. Ezek. xvi. 63.

^c Ps. xxv. 7.

^d Rom. vii. 14—24.

^e 2 Cor. v. 4.

^f Isai. xxxviii. 15.

^g Job xl. 4. and xlii. 6.

3. An overwhelming sense of God's goodness—

[Nothing is more characteristic of true piety than this. Every day and hour we have reason to adore the divine goodness. What patience does God exercise towards us under all our backslidings! What readiness does he manifest to return to our souls the very instant we return to him, yea, often revealing himself to us, and shedding abroad his love in our hearts, when we had no reason to expect any thing but some heavy token of his displeasure! The psalmist, impressed with such views of God, exclaims, "O how great is thy goodness which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee, which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men^h!" But the most striking example of this frame of mind is afforded us by the poor woman, who, to express her love and gratitude, kissed the feet of her Saviour, and washed them with floods of tearsⁱ. Would to God that such were the state of our minds, and that we might ever be found, as to our souls at least, in that posture!]

Omitting many other grounds of weeping, we proceed to inquire,

II. What encouragement we have to weep?

To those who sow their corn, there is but one harvest: but to those who sow in tears there are two:

1. We shall reap in this world—

[God will not despise the broken and contrite heart^k: on the contrary, "he will hear the voice of our weeping:" tears, when flowing from a contrite soul, have an eloquence which he cannot resist. He will speak peace to the soul: he will blot out its transgressions as a morning cloud^l. He will cause the light of his countenance to shine upon it; and will give unto it a spirit of adoption, whereby it shall cry with confidence, Abba, Father^m! And will not such a harvest recompense a hundred years of weeping? Look but at the state of the Prodigal, and see him, after his short seed-time of weeping, welcomed to his father's house, and feasting with him on the fatted calf; was he not well repaid? had he any reason to regret his tears of penitence? Thus then shall it be with us *in this world*, provided we be content to sow in tears: "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy shall come in the morningⁿ."]]

2. We shall reap also in the world to come—

[All that the penitent soul enjoys in this world is but an earnest of what it shall hereafter possess. There is "a full

^h Ps. xxxi. 19.

ⁱ Luke vii. 38.

^k Ps. li. 17.

^l Luke vii. 47, 48, 50. 1 John i. 9.

^m Jer. xxxi. 9, 20.

ⁿ Ps. xxx. 5.

reward^e," "an everlasting life^f," which shall be reaped as the fruit of what we now sow. The tears we shed are all treasured up with care in the vial of our heavenly Father: every sigh, and every groan, shall be remembered before him; and shall add to that abundant and eternal weight of glory which we shall then receive. And who can estimate those "sheaves which we shall then bring with us?" How will all our sorrows vanish in an instant, and be turned into unutterable joy^g! Let us then look forward to that time, and "not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."]

ADDRESS—

1. To those who have never known any seed-time like this—

[Is there not occasion enough for you to weep? Think how you have neglected your God and Father; how you have trampled on the blood of Christ your Saviour: and how you have resisted the motions of the Holy Spirit in your hearts! Think too, how you have made the very consideration of God's mercy and forbearance an occasion of more boldness in transgressing against him! This, independent of any gross acts of sin, is sufficient to make your head a fountain of tears to run down day and night for your iniquities. "Be afflicted, then, and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy into heaviness; humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up^h."]]

2. To those who are daily sowing in tears—

[Possibly, some may be discouraged, because they do not reap so soon as they expected. But, if this be the case, let them examine whether they do indeed "sorrow after a godly sort:" and, if they have the testimony of a good conscience in this respect, let them wait patiently, as the husbandman^s, for "doubtless they shall come again with rejoicing:" joy and gladness are sown for them, and shall spring up in due season^t. Let them be contented to "go on their way" weeping, even though the way be ever so long; for tears are a seed "precious" unto God, and they shall bring a glorious harvest at the last.]]

^e 2 John, ver. 8.

^f Gal. vi. 8.

^g Isai. xxx. 10.

^h Jam. iv. 9, 10.

^s Jam. v. 7.

^t Ps. xcvi. 11.

DCCXXI.

THE SPIRITUAL HARVEST.

Ps. exxvi. 5, 6. *They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.*

SO much of sorrow is entailed on fallen man, that his path through life is not improperly called, a vale of tears. But it is not to the ungodly only that this portion is allotted: the man who is regenerate still finds much occasion to weep; and if he have reasons for joy peculiar to himself, so also has he for grief. The Israelites, when restored from their captivity in Babylon, felt, as well they might, that the mercies vouchsafed to them were exceeding great. The very heathen that surrounded them were constrained to acknowledge this. But, when they came to their own land, and saw the desolations that were spread on every side, and reflected on the time and labour that must be employed in rebuilding their city and temple, on the opposition they were likely to meet with in their work, and on their utter incapacity to restore either the city or temple to their former grandeur, they might well weep. They were, however, encouraged with the divine assurance, that God would be with them in their labours, and prosper their endeavours; and that, if they were content to “sow in tears, they should reap in joy;” yea, that every one of them who should “go forth, weeping, and bearing precious seed, should doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.”

But we must not confine ourselves to the immediate occasion on which these words were written. They refer to every one that is engaged in raising a spiritual temple to the Lord: and they assure to him a happy issue to his exertions.

To elucidate the subject, we shall consider,

I. The events here connected—

Between seed-time and harvest there is in the minds of all a necessary connexion; and as in the natural world the action of sowing has always a reference to that of reaping, so it has also in the spiritual world.

The seed which the Christian sows is “tears”—

[What other can he sow, when he looks back upon the transgressions of his former life? How he, from the first moment that he began to act, lived in rebellion against his God!

In no respect has he been subject to the law of God, or regulated himself according to the divine commands. From open and flagrant sins he may be free: but he has lived as without God in the world, making his own will the one rule of his conduct, and his own pleasure the only end of his existence — — Does not such a life as this call for deep humiliation, and require to be mourned over with floods of tears?

Nor is this contrition less called for by his sins of daily incursion. Let any man compare the frame of his mind with that which his circumstances, and God's dealings with him, demand: how faint his gratitude for mercies received! how superficial his sorrow for sins committed! how cold his devotions at the throne of grace! how feeble his efforts to glorify his God! Verily, in the retrospect of every succeeding day, he may well sit down and weep bitterly, yea, and mourn before God in dust and ashes.

In truth, this is, in a measure, the habit of the Christian's mind; he is bowed down under a sense of his own manifold infirmities; and he walks softly before God, under a consciousness of his own extreme unworthiness. If David could say, in reference to the sins of others, "Rivers of water run down mine eyes, because men keep not thy law," how much more may every man say it, in reference to his own sins! In the days to which we are looking forward, when the remnant of Israel shall return to the Lord their God, it is precisely in this way that they will come up to Zion: "They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble: for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my first-born^a."]

From this seed, however, shall spring a harvest of "joy"—

[In the natural world we expect to reap the very seed which we have sown: but it is not so in the spiritual world. If we sow *tears*, shall we reap *tears*? No, never, never, never. Far different shall be the fruit arising from that seed! even *joy*, yea, "joy unspeakable and glorified." Look at the very remnant of whom we have just spoken; and see the issue of their humiliation: "They shall come," says the prophet, "and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the Lord, for wheat, and for wine, and for oil, and for the young of the flock and of the herd: and their souls shall be as a watered garden; and they shall not sorrow any more at all. Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, both young men and old together: for I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice

^a Jer. xxxi. 9.

from their sorrow^b." It must be observed, that the first-fruits of this harvest are enjoyed even now: for the very scope of the Gospel is not only to "proclaim liberty to the captives; but to give unto them that mourn in Zion, to give them," I say, "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord; and that He may be glorified^c." But, after all, this is only a foretaste of that which they shall hereafter enjoy, a cluster from Eshcol, an earnest of their future inheritance. The time is coming when they shall reap the full harvest in the fruition of their God, in whose "presence there is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore^d."]]

The connexion between these two periods being marked, I proceed to shew,

II. The certainty and blessedness of this connexion—

And,

1. The certainty of it—

[In the natural world the connexion is not sure: every care may have been exercised in preparing the ground, and the best seed may have been sown in it; and yet, through blasting or mildew, or some other unforeseen calamity, the hopes of the husbandman may be disappointed. But in the spiritual world this can never occur. There may be many events which *seem* unpropitious, and threaten the total destruction of the life of God in the soul: but God will overrule them all for the final accomplishment of his own gracious purposes, agreeably to his own express engagement, that "All things shall work together for good to them that love God, to them that are the called according to his purpose^e." The untoward circumstances may continue for a considerable length of time; but God engages, that "though their weeping may endure for a night, joy shall assuredly come to them in the morning^f." Extremely beautiful is that promise in the Prophet Hosea: "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord. His goings forth *are prepared as the morning^g*." The benighted traveller may be ready to imagine that the morning, as it were, will never arrive. But the sun, though as remote as possible from us, will return, and is actually making a progress towards us; and has its radiance ready prepared to pour it forth, for the benefit of the earth, at the appointed hour. So, in the darkest seasons of desertion is God prepared to lift up the light of his reconciled countenance upon us, and to refresh our souls with his enlightening and invigorating beams.]]

^b Jer. xxxi. 12, 13.

^c Isai. lxi. 1—3.

^d Ps. xvi. 11.

^e Rom. viii. 28.

^f Ps. xxx. 5.

^g Hos. vi. 3.

2. The blessedness of it—

[The joy of the harvestman may be fitly used to characterize the Christian's consolations here^h: but it will convey no idea of his felicity hereafter; for all that here he sought and tasted shall there be enjoyed in its utmost fulness: and if the feast of which the prodigal was made to partake, on returning to his Father's house, was so blessed, what must the banquet be which is prepared for us above! Verily, in comparison of *that*, the sublimest happiness of man on earth is no more than as a twinkling star to the meridian sun. To attempt to speak of the heavenly glory, is only to "darken counsel by words without knowledge:" for, what conception have we of the immediate vision of our God in the full effulgence of his glory? or what idea can we form of that throne and that kingdom which we shall possess above? Suffice it to say, that all which the blood of Christ could purchase, and all that the love of God can bestow, is the portion reserved for us in the realms of bliss.]

BEHOLD, then,

1. How desirable is true repentance—

[I grant that repentance, considered without relation to its consequences, is not a pleasing exercise of mind: nor would a husbandman find any pleasure in casting his seed into the ground, if he had no prospect of a future recompence. But both the husbandman and the penitent sow in hope. Each of them knows, that without sowing he can never reap; and each of them expects, that if he "sow in hope, he shall be partaker of his hope." Hence the employment is that which each of them affects. But there is this difference between the two: the husbandman is confined to a few weeks for the discharge of his duty, whereas the penitent prosecutes his labours to the very end of life; seeing that there is no day or hour which does not give him fresh occasion for penitential sorrow. He is to go forth bearing "a seed-basketⁱ;" and exactly as the sower, bearing the seed-basket, scatters the seed as universally as he can over the whole field, so does the penitent, every step he takes in the field of life. And whereas one may sow too early and too much, the other knows that he never can too soon begin the blessed work; and that the more profusely he sows, the more abundantly he shall reap: God having ordained, in reference to this as well as to every other duty, that "he who soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly, and he who soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully^k." To all then I say, "Be afflicted, and mourn and weep: let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy into heaviness: humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God,

^h Isai. ix. 3. ⁱ So it is rendered in the margin of our Bible.

^k 2 Cor. ix. 6.

and he shall lift you up¹." I say, To *all*, without exception, would I give this advice; for it is by a conformity to it, under the Gospel dispensation, that every child of God shall be known: "In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going, and weeping: they shall go, and seek the Lord their God. They shall ask the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward; saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten^m."]

2. How reconciled we should be to trials—

[To the Christian there may be many storms and tempests, or a long-protracted season of distress, which may threaten the destruction of all his prospects: but as, in relation to the wheat, the frost is even desirable to destroy the vermin, so are diversities of seasons beneficial to the spiritual seed: as St. Peter has said; "The trial of our faith, which is much more precious than of gold, which, though it stand the trial of fire, will perish at last, will be to praise and honour and glory at the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christⁿ." It is remarkable that our blessed Lord, speaking of himself as the true vine, and of his people as the branches, says of "every branch that *beareth fruit*, the husbandman purgeth *it*, that it may bring forth more fruit^o." It might be hoped, that, since it was already fruitful, it might escape the wounds inflicted by the pruning-knife: but that is not consistent with the will of the great Husbandman, who consults its ultimate benefit in proportion to the prospect which it affords of progressive fruitfulness. So are God's dearest people often most severely tried; and they whose sheaves shall hereafter be found most abundant, are often made to apprehend an entire failure of all their prospects. Consider, thou tempted Believer, how profitable thy trials have been to thee; how they have tended to humble thy pride, to weaken thine attachment to earthly things, to make thee feel thy need of God's continual help, and to quicken thee in thy way to the heavenly Zion: and learn to say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; and it is in love and faithfulness that thou hast afflicted me."]

3. How sweet to the Christian should be the thoughts of death—

[Death is as the waggons that are about to carry home the produce of the field, or as those which were sent to bear the afflicted Jacob to his beloved Joseph. The sight of these made Jacob forget all his troubles, and become indifferent to all that he possessed in this world: "He regarded not his stuff, because all the good of the land of Egypt was his^p." So then,

¹ Jam. iv. 9, 10.

^m Jer. l. 4, 5.

ⁿ 1 Pet. i. 7.

^o John xv. 2.

^p Gen. xlv. 19, 20.

Brethren, let it be with you. Behold the waggons sent to bear you home, whither you shall "go rejoicing, *bearing your sheaves with you.*" Yes, the tears that you have shed have been treasured up by God in his vial^a; and they shall be recompensed into your bosom a hundred and a thousand fold. Hear the declaration of God himself to this effect: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord: even so saith the Spirit: for they *rest from their labours, and their works do follow them*." Only view death aright, and you will account it amongst your most valued treasures: you will even "be looking for, and hasting unto, the coming of the day of Christ." If it "be unto you Christ to live," doubt not a moment but that "to die will be gain^s." For this is the irreversible decree of God, that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap: he that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting^t."]

^a Ps. lvi. 8. ^r Rev. xiv. 13. ^s Phil. i. 21. ^t Gal. vi. 7, 8.

DCCXXII.

GOD'S MERCY AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO PRAYER.

Ps. cxxx. 1—4. *Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.*

IN seasons of affliction, it is a great comfort to see how others in similar circumstances, have found relief. It is in this view that biography is peculiarly interesting; and Scripture biography more especially, because it is more authentic in itself, and a surer ground for wise and profitable observations. The Psalms are a rich repository of such instruction. David was a man of deep experience. His afflictions, both temporal and spiritual, were very abundant: and, as they are faithfully related to us, so do we see under them the workings of his mind. In the passage just read we see,

I. The means he used for deliverance from his distresses—

His trials were greatly diversified, and very severe—

[Unless it were recorded on divine authority, we should scarcely conceive it possible that a man of David's character should be an object of such inveterate and envenomed malice

as he was in the eyes of Saul: and, after the returns which he made to Saul, we should scarcely think that human malignity could ever arrive at such a height, or rage with such unrelenting fury, as it did in that envious and jealous monarch. Of his troubles under persecution David speaks under the same metaphor as that which is used in our text: "Save me, O Lord! for the waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me. I am weary of my crying: my throat is dried: mine eyes fail, while I wait for my God. They that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head: they that would destroy me, being mine enemies wrongfully, are mighty^a."

It seems, however, that on the present occasion he refers to his spiritual troubles, because it is of his iniquities that he chiefly complains, and of forgiveness that he expresses his chief desire. It might be supposed that so holy a man as he should have no complaints of this kind to make: but the truth is, that the more holy any man is, the more enlarged will be his views of the spirituality of God's Law, and the more painful his sense of his short-comings and defects: and it should seem that David was permitted to sustain great anguish of mind on this account, that so he might be the better fitted to instruct and comfort God's tempted people to the very end of time. Hear his complaints under a sense of God's displeasure: "Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps: thy wrath lieth hard upon me; and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves^b." Sometimes he was so overwhelmed, that he thought himself altogether an outcast from God, and doubted whether he should ever find mercy at his hands: "Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies^c?"]

Under all his trials he had recourse to God in prayer—

[“Out of the depths he cried unto the Lord.” He well knew that none but God could support him under all his temporal afflictions, and that there was no other comforter amidst the troubles of his soul. Hence, on all occasions, he betook himself to God in prayer. Under trials from man he says, “I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies^d.” And under the frowns of Almighty God he still sought refuge in the arms of him whose displeasure he feared: “The sorrows of death

^a Ps. lxi. 1—4.

^b Ps. lxxxviii. 6, 7.

^c Ps. lxxvii. 7—9.

^d Ps. xviii. 3—6.

compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the Lord; O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul^e!" Thus did Jeremiah also, under his extremities: "They have cut off my life in the dungeon, and cast a stone upon me. Waters flowed over mine head; then I said, I am cut off. I called upon thy name, O Lord, out of the low dungeon. Thou hast heard my voice; hide not thine ear at my breathing, at my cry^f!" Thus it is that we also, under all our troubles, should approach our God. Nor should we be discouraged because we cannot find enlargement in prayer: our feelings may be too deep for utterance; and our desires may find vent only in sighs, and groans, and tears: but, if only we be sincere, God will hear our very "breathing and our cry.]"

From the account which David gives us of his prayers, we learn,

II. The views of God, from whence he derived his chief encouragement—

He dared not to plead for any thing on the footing of *justice*—

[He was sensible that he in no respect came up to the perfect demands of God's Law; and that, if God should "mark his iniquities," it would be impossible for him to "stand;" since there was not an act, or word, or thought in his whole life that could endure so severe a scrutiny. Such is the view which all holy men have of their own infirmities: they know that God "charges even his angels with folly^g," and that "the very heavens are not clean in his sight:" how much less can man be pure, who by nature comes from a corrupt source; and, by practice, drinks iniquity like water^h? Job was the most perfect man of his day: yet he says, "If I should say I am perfect, my own tongue would prove me perverseⁱ." And every living man must deprecate the being dealt with according to the demands of strict justice, saying, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord; for in thy sight shall no man living be justified^k."]

His only hope was founded on the mercy of his God—

[Mercy is an essential perfection of the Divine nature, and, consequently, inseparable from God. But the expression, "There is forgiveness with thee," intimates, that it is treasured up, as it were, in the Divine bosom, ready to be bestowed on every weeping penitent. We are told, that "it has pleased the Father that in Christ should all fulness dwell;" and that "out

^e Ps. cxvi. 3, 4.

^f Lam. iii. 53—56.

^g Job iv. 18.

^h Job xv. 14—16.

ⁱ Job ix. 2, 3, 20.

^k Ps. cxliii. 2.

of his fulness we are all to receive," according to our respective necessities. This was David's encouragement. Had he not known this, he would have sat down in utter despair. It is a consciousness of this that emboldens a penitent to draw nigh to God, and to ask for mercy at his hands. A soul that is gone beyond the reach of mercy, hates God with a perfect hatred, and "never repents to give him glory¹:" but the soul that hopes in his mercy, feels towards him a filial fear and reverence; and this holy fear is ever augmented in proportion to the hope that is cherished in the soul. Hence, when God says respecting his people, "I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me;" he adds, "And it shall be to me a name of joy, a praise, and an honour before all the nations of the earth, which shall hear all the good that I do unto them. And they shall fear and tremble for all the goodness, and for all the prosperity, that I procure unto it^m."]

In this view of David's experience we may SEE,

1. Our dependence on God—

[To whom can we go in a time of trouble? Who can afford us even the smallest help, especially under a sense of sin, and under a dread of God's displeasure? We may possess all that the world can give, but it will not for a moment soothe the agonies of a guilty conscience. Of all things under the sun, in this view, it must be said, "Miserable comforters are ye all!" Our help is in God alone. "He is the only fountain of life: and in his light alone can we see lightⁿ."]

2. Our obligations to him—

[When we see so holy a man as David brought into "depths" where he feels as one ready to perish, what thanks can we render unto God, that we are enabled to pass through life in peaceful tranquillity, and with a cheerful hope of eternal life! None but those who have experienced the hidings of God's face, and the terrors of his wrath, can have any conception what it is to be reduced to such a state. Does David say, "Fearfulness hath taken hold upon me, and an horrible dread hath overwhelmed me?" Why, then, is not that the condition of *our* souls? Who does not deserve it? Who might not well be left to sustain it throughout his whole life? If we were saved from perdition at last, it would be a mercy, for which we should have cause to bless God to all eternity. But to enjoy peace here, and the light of God's countenance, verily this is a blessing for which we can never be sufficiently thankful.

But there is yet a richer blessing vouchsafed unto us; and

¹ Rev. xvi. 9, 11.

^m Jer. xxxiii. 8, 9.

ⁿ Ps. xxxvi. 9.

that is, that in all our trials, of whatever kind, we have God himself for our refuge. Who need to be afraid of depths, when he has a God to go unto, a God able and willing to deliver him? Look at the heathen, who know not God; or at those who, though in a Christian land, are unacquainted with the great mystery of redemption. *They* are in a pitiable condition *indeed*: but the believing penitent, though in darkness, has reason to rejoice; because his "heaviness will endure but for a night, and joy will come to him in the morning." He may descend with Jonah to the very precincts of hell; but in due season he shall be brought forth to light and liberty and joy.]

3. Our true wisdom—

[The resolution of David, in the words following our text, should be ours. Whether in trouble or at ease, let us wait on the Lord, and "hold us fast by God." The man who has been watching through the night looks with eager desire to the break of day, when he shall be relieved from his toil. But with far greater earnestness, and with sweeter assurance too, should we wait on God, confident that he will appear for us in the hour of need, and grant us that rest which our necessities require. Let us then live in this habit; and then, "though the fig-tree should not blossom, nor the fields yield their meat, nor any herd be found in the stalls, we may rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of our Salvation."]]

° Hab. iii. 17, 18.

DCCXXIII.

WAITING UPON GOD.

Ps. cxxx. 5, 6. *I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in His word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning; I say, more than they that watch for the morning.*

MANY of God's people are at times reduced to great straits, either through the violence of persecution or the force of temptation: and, under such circumstances, what refuge have they, but in God? It is in vain for them to look to the creature: and it sometimes appears to them to no purpose to wait even upon God, because the desired relief is so long delayed. David, under delays of this kind, was sometimes discouraged: but, whatever were the depths into which he had fallen on the present occasion, it is manifest that he cast himself upon the mercy of his

God, and determined to “hold fast by God,” and to maintain his confidence in him even to the end. I will,

I. Unfold to you the experience of David—

He declares it to us in few words: “he waited upon God.” And the comparison by which he illustrates the frame of his mind, will serve us as a clew, whereby to find the full import of his words. He may possibly refer to watchmen in general, who, during a long and tedious night, wait for the morning, when they shall be released from their fatigues, and retire to their rest. But I rather think that he refers to the Priests and Levites, whom he had appointed to watch nightly in the Tabernacle^a, and who, if they were not filled with a spirit of devotion, by which they might enjoy communion with their God, would long earnestly for the morning, when they might terminate their irksome task. But more than they did David long for the return of God to his soul; waiting for him,

1. With earnest desire—

[No temporal distress will bear any comparison with that which is spiritual. The troubles of an awakened or tempted soul are very heavy; and the depths into which it is plunged, by an apprehension of God’s wrath, are very terrible. No wonder that David “panted after the Lord, as the hart after the water-brooks^b :” no wonder that, when God’s answers to his prayers were delayed, he cried, “How long, O Lord! how long^c?” Nor is such importunity disapproved of God: on the contrary, he would have us “cry day and night to him^d,” and give him no rest, till he arise, and come to our relief^e.]

2. With patient hope—

[Though earnest in prayer, he was willing to tarry the Lord’s leisure; and would not attempt to use any unbecoming means for his own relief. Repeatedly had he it in his power to slay Saul: but he would neither perpetrate the act himself, nor suffer it to be perpetrated by others. He committed his cause to God, to whom alone vengeance belongeth. So, in reference to the mercies he desired at God’s hands, he was willing to wait. His earnestness appears in that he says *repeatedly*, “*My soul doth wait.*” It was not a mere wish that he entertained for relief, but a most eager desire: yet was he as far from impatience as from indifference. He rested on the

^a Ps. cxxxiv. 1. ^b Ps. xlii. 1—3. ^c Ps. vi. 3. and xliii. 1, 2. *four times.*

^d Luke xviii. 7.

^e Isai. lxiii. 6, 7.

word of God: "In his word," saith he, "do I hope." It was quite sufficient for him that God had promised to succour his tempted people: and, whatever apparent contrarieties there might be between his dispensations and his word, he had no doubt but that they would all be cleared up in due season, and that not a jot or tittle of God's word would pass away, till all were fulfilled.]

3. With assured expectation—

[A watchman knows that the morning will at last appear; and therefore, instead of abandoning his post, he waits till the destined hour for his relief arrive. Thus David assured himself that God would come to him at last, and reveal himself to him out of the abundance of his grace and love. The verses following my text shew this to have been the real experience of his soul, and afford me occasion to,]

II. Commend it to your imitation—

Not in the context only, but in other places, does David call upon us to imitate his example, and to avail ourselves of his experience for the comfort and direction of our own souls. "I had fainted," says he, "unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say on the Lord^f." Thus would I now entreat you to mark the posture of David's soul in this season of trial. Consider,

1. How suited it is to every one of you—

[You may not have committed David's sins, or be subjected to David's trials: but where is there one of you that is not a sinner before God? Who amongst you does not stand in need of mercy? Who must not find his consolation altogether in the contemplation of God; saying with David, "If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared^g?" Then it is plain that the same waiting spirit becomes you also. Yes, in a spirit of penitence should you be crying to God, "Lord, hear my voice; let thine ear be attentive to the voice of my supplications^h!" And, however long God may defer his answer to your prayers, you should wait with meekness and patience. "If the eyes of a servant are to the hand of his master, and the eyes of a maiden to the hand of her mistress, should not your eyes be unto the Lord your God until he have mercy upon youⁱ?" Surely you may well be as observant of

^f Ps. xxvii. 13, 14. ^g ver. 3, 4. ^h ver. 2. ⁱ Ps. cxxiii. 2.

God as you expect your fellow-creature to be of you. And think how long God has waited upon you; calling, but ye would not hear; entreating, but ye would not regard him. Shall you then be impatient, if he come not at the first moment that you call; and that too when you are urged by nothing but a fear of his wrath, which you have so richly merited? Know, every one of you, that it becomes you to wait his appointed time; and to be satisfied if the morning never arrive till the very moment of your departure from this world of woe.]

2. What honour it does to God—

[A meek, patient, and submissive spirit honours every perfection of the Deity. It expresses a confidence in his *wisdom*, as alone discerning the fittest time to appear in your behalf. It shews a persuasion of his *goodness*, that does not willingly afflict you, but orders every thing for your greatest good, even to humble you the more deeply, and thereby to prepare you for a richer improvement of his mercy whensoever it shall be vouchsafed unto you. It honours also his *power*, as able to impart relief, whensoever his wisdom and goodness shall judge it expedient to confer the blessing. Above all, it glorifies God's *truth and faithfulness*, in that it makes the written word a ground of hope, yea, and of an assured hope, that whatsoever God has promised he will perform.

I ask then, Is it not desirable that you should be found in a posture by which God is so honoured, and with which he cannot but be pleased? Let every one of you, therefore, be able to make that appeal to God, "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord^k."]

3. What benefit it ensures to the waiting soul—

[Justly is it said, "The Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord^l." But let us hear the Psalmist's own experience: "I waited patiently for the Lord, and he inclined unto me and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings: and he hath put a new song into my mouth, even praise unto our God^m." And who is there, even though he should not have been delivered to the same extent, that must not yet say, "It is good for me to draw near to Godⁿ?" I entreat you, then, to adopt the resolution of the Psalmist, "I will wait on thy name; for it is good before thy saints^o." If at any time your mind be disquieted by reason of delay, check and chide your soul even as David did: "Why art thou cast

^k Gen. xlix. 18.

^l Lam. iii. 25, 26.

^m Ps. xl. 1—3.

ⁿ Ps. lxxiii. 28.

^o Ps. lii. 9.

down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God^p." You must never forget that appeal which God himself makes to the whole universe, "I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain^q." Even in this world you may be sure that God will accept and bless you: for he has said, "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint^r." But in the world to come, can any one doubt the acceptance of a penitent, contrite, and believing soul? You might as well doubt the existence of God himself: for he has said, that "we shall reap if we faint not^s:" and to all his believing Israel he has engaged, that "they shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation, and shall not be ashamed nor confounded world without end^t."]

^p Ps. xlii. 11.

^q Isai. xlv. 19.

^r Isai. xl. 31.

^s Gal. vi. 9.

^t Isai. xlv. 17.

DCCXXIV.

THE DUTY OF HOPING IN GOD.

Ps. cxxx. 7, 8. *Let Israel hope in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.*

THAT advice which flows from experience is at all times most worthy of our attention. In this view the words of our text claim peculiar regard. David, in the psalm before us, records a very signal deliverance which he had recently experienced, probably from an overwhelming sense of his own guilt and corruption: and, having informed us what methods he had used to obtain deliverance, and how effectual they had proved for his restoration to happiness, he recommends the adoption of them to all the people of God under all difficulties whatsoever; and assures them, that they shall not in any instance fail of success: "Let Israel," &c.

He sets before us,

I. Our duty—

Hope in God, as men generally use the term, is nothing more than an unfounded expectation that God will save us, whatever be our state, and what-

ever be our conduct. But a scriptural hope implies a suitable regard to the things we hope for, and to him in whom our hope is placed. It implies,

1. That we pray to him with fervour—

[This was united with the Psalmist's hope^a: and it must also be with ours^b. To pretend to hope in God while we neglect to spread our wants before him, is the grossest hypocrisy, and the most fatal delusion^c.]

2. That we wait for him with patience—

[It was in this manner that David exercised his hope^d. Nor can we act otherwise, if we be sincere in our profession^e. To be impatient, is an unequivocal mark of unbelief, and despondency^f. But to wait patiently the Lord's leisure, is the office and evidence of faith and hope^g.]

3. That we depend on him with steadfastness—

[The promises of God to those who seek him, must be the ground of our hope^h. We are not to regard difficulties of any kind, as though they could prove any obstacle to God. However circumstances, both within and without, may seem to justify despair, we must "hope beyond and against hopeⁱ," assured that, as nothing is impossible with God, so not one jot or tittle of his word shall ever fail.]

This duty being of infinite importance, and of universal obligation, let us consider,

II. Our encouragement to perform it—

If we look inward, we shall find nothing but discouragement. But if, with David, we look to God, we may find abundant encouragement,

1. In his attributes—

[While justice bears a frowning aspect, mercy smiles on the repenting sinner. God has opened a way for the exercise of his mercy in perfect consistency with the demands of justice; and to exercise it is his delight^k. This attribute is as essential to his nature as wisdom, or power, or any other^l. Nor needs he to have it excited by a view of our misery (much less by any meritorious services of ours;) it is ever "with him;" and is ready to manifest itself towards all those who call upon him.^m]

2. In his works—

^a ver. 1, 2.

^b Matt. vii. 7, 8.

^c Ezek. xxxvi. 37.

^d ver. 5, 6.

^e Rom. viii. 25.

^f Isai. xxviii. 16. 1 Sam. xiii. 11, 12. ^g Hab. ii. 3.

^h ver. 5.

ⁱ *παρ' ἐλπίδα*, Rom. iv. 18. Job xiii. 15. Isai. l. 10.

^k Mic. vii. 18.

^l Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.

^m Rom. x. 12.

[“Redemption” is the crown of all his works: and this also is with him, that he may impart it to those who groan under their sore bondage. Yea, with him is “plenteous” redemption: he himself, as our near kinsman, (bone of our bone, and flesh of our fleshⁿ) has the right of redemption vested in him^o: and, having ability to pay the price, he will discharge our debt, and restore us, not only to liberty, but also to the inheritance which we have so basely alienated.]

3. In his word—

[The declaration of his determined purpose by an inspired writer, is equivalent to an express promise. And, if the extent and certainty of this promise be considered, what an encouragement will it afford us to hope in God! There is no limitation whatever to the promise, provided, like “Israel” of old, we wrestle with God for the performance of it^p. However numerous and inveterate our iniquities may be, they shall “all” be pardoned, and “all” subdued^q.]

APPLICATION—

1. To prevent any abuse of this subject, we shall *guard* it—

[The repetition of the name “Israel” distinctly marks the characters to whom the text is more immediately to be applied. It is the *praying, waiting, and depending* sinner that is exhorted to hope in God: and it is he alone who can expect redemption at the hands of God. Let such therefore see their duty and their privilege: but let those who live in the habitual neglect of God know, that their “hope is as a spider’s web, that shall soon be swept away with the besom of destruction^r.”]

2. To impress the subject more deeply on our minds, we shall *enforce* it—

[The advice here given is the most *suitable* that can be given, and if followed, will be *productive* of the greatest *happiness*. Were any of us directed to indulge a hope from our own endeavours, we should soon perceive the folly of such advice. Every day and hour would bring us fresh occasion for despair. But in God there is nothing wanting: he has the *right*, the *power*, and the *will* to redeem us. Nor, if we trust in him, shall we ever be confounded^s.

Let us therefore not limit either the mercy or power of our God; but putting away all self-righteous hopes^t, or unbelieving fears^u, let us repose an unlimited confidence in our merciful and faithful Redeemer.]

ⁿ Eph. v. 30.

^o Lev. xxv. 25, 47, 48, 49.

^p Gen. xxxii. 24—28.

^q Isai. i. 18.

^r Job viii. 13, 14.

^s Isai. xlv. 17.

^t Phil. iii. 3.

^u Ps. xliii. 11.

DCCXXV.

WEANEDNESS FROM THE WORLD.

Ps. cxxxī. 2. *My soul is even as a weaned child.*

AMONG the great variety of representations whereby the Christian's character is set forth in the Holy Scriptures, that of a little child holds a very distinguished place^a. To this we annex the idea of humility, and teachableness, and resignation to the will of our heavenly Father. In this last view more especially the behaviour of a child was beautifully exemplified in the conduct of David. He had been anointed to the kingly office by God's command; yet he waited patiently for many years without ever aspiring to the kingdom, till the Lord's time came to give it him. Though he was persecuted with murderous rage and jealousy by Saul, he would never lift up his hand against the Lord's anointed, or give occasion of offence to the government under which he lived: on the contrary, he appeals to God in this psalm, that he had not indulged any ambitious thoughts, or interfered in any affairs of state, but had acquiesced in the disposals of an all-wise Providence, even as a weaned child does in the directions and government of his mother^b.

To illustrate this disposition of mind, we shall shew,

I. What those things are from which we ought to be weaned—

[The circumstances alluded to in the text will serve to direct our thoughts. David's indifference to all the pomp of royalty shews, that we should be weaned from *pleasure*, from *riches*, from *honour*, from *every thing* which we possess in this world.

Pleasure is but ill suited to the advancement of a soul in the divine life. There are indeed pleasures which we may lawfully enjoy: but if the heart be set upon them, we cannot properly engage in that race which we are to run, or that warfare we are to maintain: nor can we have any more decisive evidence of our being still unrenewed by divine grace^c.

Riches also may be possessed with innocence; but they must

^a Matt. xviii. 3.

^b ver. 1, 2.

^c Luke viii. 14. 2 Tim. iii. 4. Jam. v. 1, 5. 1 Tim. v. 6.

not be coveted. They should rather be considered as a snare which we are to dread, than as a blessing we are eager to obtain. They are as clay upon the feet of one that is running a race^d, or as a weight tied to the neck of one that is swimming for his life^e. There has scarcely ever occurred an instance wherein the acquisition of them has furthered the divine life; but thousands have been retarded by them, and not a few eternally destroyed^f.

Reputation is that which men in general are most averse to sacrifice: but we must be willing to part with that, if we would be Christians indeed. If we seek the honour that cometh of men, we cannot possibly be steadfast in the faith^g; we shall shrink from reproach, and prove unfaithful to God in the time of trial^h; and being ashamed of Christ, we shall cause him to be ashamed of us in the day of judgmentⁱ.

There is not any thing, not *health*, nor *friends*, nor *liberty*, nor *life* itself, that we should value any further than as it may be improved to the glory of God^k. Our hearts must be weaned from all, so as to be ready to part with every thing, whenever God, in his providence, shall call for it.]

To evince that such a state is attainable, we shall shew,

II. What methods God employs to wean us from them—

[Without any indelicacy or impropriety we may observe, in allusion to the metaphor in the text, that to wean us from creature-comforts, our heavenly Parent *embitters them to us, withdraws them from us, and gives us something more suitable in their stead.*

Such is our attachment to earthly things, that we should never be willing to part from them, if they were not in some way or other embittered to us. God therefore, in mercy to us, mixes gall and wormwood with every cup he puts into our hands. In the pursuit of pleasure, our brightest prospects become clouded, our highest gratifications cloy, and numberless unforeseen accidents arise to damp our joys, and to disappoint our expectations. In the attainment of wealth, there are many cares to corrode, many vexations to disquiet us, so that we must write on all the bags that we have amassed, “This is vanity and vexation of spirit.” The acquisition of knowledge seems to promise the most permanent satisfaction; but such is the labour requisite to attain it, and so little, after all, is within the reach of human intellect, that the wisest of men was constrained to say, “Much study is a weariness to the flesh; and

^d Hab. ii. 6. ^e Matt. xix. 23, 24. ^f 1 Tim. vi. 9—11.

^g John v. 41. ^h John xii. 42, 43. ⁱ Mark viii. 38.

^k Col. iii. 2. 1 John ii. 15—17. Luke xiv. 26.

he that increases knowledge, increases sorrow¹." Even those dear relations of life which God has given for our richest consolation, the wife of our bosom, or the fruit of our body, are not without their attendant troubles; which are designed to teach us, that "this is not our rest^m," and that God alone is the proper portion of the soul.

But notwithstanding all our disappointments, we are prone to seek our happiness in the creature; on which account God is necessitated, as it were, to deprive us of things, which, if continued to us, would rob him of our hearts. Hence it is that the dearest of God's children are often most heavily afflicted. He sees perhaps that our health, our riches, our friends, have drawn us aside from him, or impeded our progress in the divine life, or that they will prove disadvantageous to us in the issue; and therefore he lays us on a bed of languishing, or causes our "riches to fly away," or "cuts off the desire of our eyes with a stroke." But his design in all this is, to weaken our idolatrous regard for created enjoyments, and to make us seek our happiness in him alone. And thousands have had more reason to bless him for the bereavements they have experienced, than for all the bounties he ever bestowed upon themⁿ.

Nothing however will finally destroy our attachment to earthly things, till we have learned how much more suitable provision God has made for the souls of his people. When therefore God, by his providence, has embittered or withdrawn our comforts, he leads us, by his grace, to that fountain of consolation, the sacred Oracles. There he proposes himself to us as a reconciled God and Father in Christ. He sets before our eyes "the unsearchable riches of Christ," the "honour that cometh of God," and the "pleasures that are at his right hand for evermore;" and, having enabled us to taste of these, he makes us to despise every thing in comparison of them, and willingly to relinquish the husks of this world, for the bread that is in our Father's house.]

But that we may not form a wrong opinion of our state, we shall declare,

III. When our souls may be said to be as a weaned child—

[The whole world, with respect to earthly enjoyments, are like a child either *before it is weaned*, or *while it is weaning*, or *when it is altogether weaned*.

The generality are like a child at the breast, minding nothing but their carnal gratifications. The world, in its pleasures, riches, or honours, is the one object of their desire, the one source of their comfort: they feed upon it all the day long;

¹ Eccl. i. 18. and xii. 12. ^m Mic. ii. 10. ⁿ Ps. cxix. 71, 75.

they fall asleep, as it were, with it in their mouths; they are clamorous for it as soon as they are awake. In their very slumbers they not unfrequently shew, how wholly their minds have been occupied with that one object. Give them their favourite gratification, and they care for nothing else: rob them of that, and not all the world can pacify them.

Such are they who have a fulness of earthly comforts. But others, to whom these things have been embittered, or from whom they have been withdrawn, are, like a weaning child, disquieted beyond measure: they are unhappy in themselves; and they disturb all around them with their peevishness and discontent. Having lost that in which alone they found delight, they can take comfort in nothing else: yea, because of one thing of which they are deprived, they have no enjoyment of all the other things that they possess. In vain have they more suitable and substantial blessings offered them; they have no appetite for the provisions of the Gospel; they refuse that which would infinitely overbalance their loss; and they pine away in querulous lamentations, when they might be nourished with "angels' food."

Some there are, however, who with David, resemble a weaned child. *They are become indifferent to carnal enjoyments.* They use with gratitude whatever God has bestowed; but they do not set their hearts upon it, or consider it as essential to their happiness^o. *They suffer the loss of all earthly things with a holy resignation and composure of mind.* Doubtless they have their feelings, like other men: but these feelings are moderated by religion, and brought into subjection to the Divine will^p. *The more they are bereaved of earthly comforts, the more entirely do they live by faith on Christ, and the more abundantly do they grow in every grace.* Afflictions drive them, not from God, but to him: and in the midst of all their bereavements they shew, that they "have meat to eat which the world knows not of," and "joys with which the stranger intermeddleth not."]

APPLICATION—

[Let those whose hearts are set upon the world, remember, how transient and unsatisfying their enjoyments are — — — Let those who are disconsolate on account of their troubles, consider for what gracious ends God has caused them to be afflicted — — — And let those who feel a measure of David's spirit, strive for yet higher attainments, in the assured expectation that the more they are weaned from all but God, the more will God communicate to them out of his inexhaustible fulness.]

^o Phil. iv. 12. Heb. xi. 24—26.

^p 2 Sam. xv. 25, 26.

DCCXXVI.

ZION A TYPE OF THE CHURCH.

Ps. cxxxii. 13—16. *The Lord hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread. I will also clothe her priests with salvation: and her saints shall shout aloud for joy.*

THE efficacy of fervent prayer is strongly marked in the Holy Scriptures: there is scarcely a saint, respecting whom any information is given us, who may not be adduced as an example of God's readiness to answer prayer. Solomon, if, as some suppose, he was the author of this Psalm, records the answer which God vouchsafed to the supplications he had offered at the dedication of his temple: and it is worthy of observation, that the very language of his petition was made the vehicle of God's promise^a.

In considering these words we shall notice,

I. God's love to his Church—

Mount Zion must be numbered among the most distinguished types, not only because its very name is given to the Church of Christ, but because God's love to his Church was represented to the world by the favours conferred on that chosen hill. As formerly on Mount Zion, so now in the Christian Church, God,

1. Dispenses his ordinances—

[The Jews were not suffered to present their offerings in any other place: there alone were the sacrifices to be slain; and there alone were the means of reconciliation with God to be exhibited before their eyes. Thus in the Church of Christ, and in that only, have we the way of life and salvation fully opened. Among the heathen world we behold no traces of that path marked out for us in the Gospel: but wherever God has called a people to the knowledge of his Son, and appointed over them a faithful shepherd, there his word is preached with power; there the atoning blood of Jesus flows; the administration of the sacraments is not there an empty ceremony, but a lively and impressive exhibition of the doctrines of grace.]

^a Compare ver. 8—10. and 2 Chron. vi. 41, 42. with the text and the verse following it.

2. Vouchsafes his presence—

[When the ark, which had long abode in a moveable tabernacle at Shiloh, was brought to Zion, its residence was fixed; and the Deity, whom it represented, called that place his “rest.” From that time his visible glory was revealed there: he dwelt between the cherubims; and was accessible to all through the blood of the sacrifices, and the mediation of the high-priest. In the Church also is his glory seen, even “the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” Whatever may be known of him in the works of creation and providence is darkness itself, in comparison of that light which shines in his Gospel. To those, who seek his face, “he manifests himself, as he does not unto the world;” and often constrains them to cry out with astonishment, “How great is his goodness! how great is his beauty!”]

3. Communicates his blessings—

[When the high-priest had finished his work within the vail, he came forth to bless the people; and his word was confirmed by God to all penitent and believing worshippers. So now in his Church does God bless his people with all spiritual blessings. He imparts pardon to the guilty, strength to the weak, consolation to the troubled: whatever any stand in need of, they are sure to obtain it, if they come to him in his appointed way^b. This thousands can attest; this thousands yet unborn shall, in every succeeding age, experience.]

But his love to the Church will yet further appear by considering,

II. The promises made to her—

These, as has been observed, precisely accord with the petitions offered. In them God assures his Church that he will bestow abundant blessings,

1. On the ordinances—

[There may be in the text some reference to the assembling of all the males three times a year at Jerusalem, when it was probable that the conflux of such multitudes to one place might produce a scarcity of provisions, and thereby distress the poor. This effect God promises to counteract by giving them abundant crops. But certainly we must understand this as relating also to spiritual food: and how delightfully is it verified under the ministration of the Gospel! The word, dispensed in one short hour, has, like the bread multiplied by our Lord, been food for thousands; and though simple, and unadorned, has, like the pulse given to Daniel and his companions,

^b Ps. xlvi. 2, 3.

been more nutritious than all the dainties sent from the monarch's table^c.]

2. On those who administer the ordinances—

[The priests who served in the temple, were clad with linen, to denote the purity that was expected of them. But they, who minister under the Gospel, provided they walk worthy of their high and holy office, shall be "clothed with salvation" itself: "in watering others, they themselves shall be watered;" and "in saving others, they themselves shall be saved." Nor is this a blessing to themselves alone; for, in proportion as ignorant and ungodly ministers are a curse to those over whom they are placed, the superintendence of pious, intelligent, and faithful ministers must be esteemed a blessing.]

3. On those who attend the ordinances—

[The request made by Solomon was, that "the saints might shout for joy:" and God tells him that they shall shout *aloud* for joy: thus does God on numberless occasions give us more than we either asked or thought. A faithful dispensation of the ordinances is a source of joy to many souls. The saints especially, who receive the truth in the love of it, are often enabled by it to "rejoice with joy unspeakable and glorified." And this is a blessing, not to themselves only, but to the whole Church. By this they adorn, and recommend the Gospel; and are stimulated to diffuse the savour of it all around them.]

INFER—

1. How little reason have mere formal worshippers to think that they belong to the Church of God!

[The enjoyment of these promises is inconsistent with habitual formality: either therefore God falsifies his word (which it were the vilest blasphemy to imagine), or the formalist is yet an "alien from the commonwealth of Israel."]

2. How impotent are all attempts to destroy the Church^d!

3. How strong is the Christian's obligation to serve and honour God!

[Does God so delight in his Church as to make it his rest, and to load it with so many benefits? Surely every member of it should testify his gratitude by a cheerful and unreserved obedience.]

^c Dan. i. 12, 13.

^d Ps. cxxv. 1. and xlviii. 12, 13. and xlv. 5. and Matt. xvi. 18.

DCCXXVII.

THE BENEFIT OF CHRISTIAN UNITY.

Ps. cxxxiii. 1—3. *Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for Brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments: as the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion; for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.*

IN this psalm we have a commendation of Christian love and unity. It seems to have been written some time after David's entire possession of the whole kingdom; when the tribes being all united under one head, the horrors of civil war were exchanged for the blessings of peace; and all who were brethren according to the flesh, enjoyed the fullest exercise of brotherly love, in union with each other, and in communion with their God. He seems to have been contemplating the blessed change, till his soul, filled with holy joy and gratitude, exclaimed, "Behold, how good and pleasant it is for Brethren to dwell together in unity!" He then pursues the same idea, illustrating both the goodness and pleasantness of it, each by an appropriate similitude; its pleasantness resembling the fragrance of the ointment poured on Aaron's head; and its goodness being justly compared to dews of Hermon or of Zion, by which a continued verdure and fertility are preserved, where without them vegetation would quickly fail. We shall follow the line he has traced out for us, and point out *the excellence of Christian unity.*

I. As conducing to our present comfort—

There is no pleasure so refined, so exquisite, as that which results from the exercise of Christian love. It always cheers the bosom in which it dwells, and imparts the sublimest joy to those who meet it with corresponding emotions. It is beautifully compared with the ointment which was poured on Aaron's head at his consecration to the priestly office.

Let us briefly examine the similitude—

[A full account of this ointment is given us in the book of Exodus^a. The ingredients of which it was composed were of the most odoriferous kind: the proportions of each were minutely specified by God himself: and its use, when properly compounded, was solely confined to the things or persons connected with the service of the sanctuary. It was strictly forbidden to the whole nation to form any other ointment like unto it, or to use any part of it for any other purpose than that which was ordained by God. It was itself most holy; and it made every thing holy that came in contact with it. At the consecration of Aaron, it was poured upon his head in rich profusion, so that it ran down upon his beard, even to *the collar* of his garment^b; and it diffused on every side a fragrance that was inexpressibly sweet and refreshing.]

Let us now consider the application of it—

[With this is Christian love to be compared. Now love is altogether of divine original: every ingredient of it is formed by the hand of God himself, and the whole compounded by him in its due proportions: and every one on whom it is poured is from thenceforth sanctified to the Lord. It is in its own nature so flowing, that when poured upon the head, it will descend upon the whole man: and so fragrant is it, that not the person himself only, but all who come in contact with him, will be refreshed with its odours: and more especially when a whole society or church are partakers of this heavenly unction, such is the fragrance, as to resemble as nearly as possible the courts of heaven itself.

Say, ye who have ever received this heavenly gift, whether ye have not been brought, as it were, into a new world, and whether ye be not breathing from day to day a new atmosphere? Compare it with that which the world has framed in imitation of it, and which gives grace and ornament to the more polished circles of society: how poor, how vapid, how destitute of all refreshing odour, is that which is called politeness! the very persons who most cultivate it, are most sensible what an empty formality it is: it is a mere mimickry of what is good: and in all the diversified expressions of it there is a secret consciousness, that nothing real is designed; that it is a mere artificial ceremony, invented and practised in order to keep out of sight those hateful passions, which would destroy all the comfort of social intercourse. Its very forms are burthensome to those who most abound in them: and it is a relief to a man to put them off, and to return to the unconstrained familiarities of domestic life. We mean not to disparage that which undoubtedly contributes much to the maintenance of public order

^a Exod. xxx. 22—33.

^b See the marginal version.

and decorum : but when compared with that love which grace inspires, it is a mere vanity ; it is like a sun painted upon canvass, in comparison with the sun shining in the firmament of heaven. Who that lives under the influence of gracious affections, and moves in a circle where Christian love abounds, does not feel this ? His spirits are not tumultuous indeed ; but they are sweetly elevated towards high and heavenly things : he carries with him a divine savour, wherever he moves : when he enters into the society of the saints, or into the tabernacle of his God, the fragrance is drawn forth and greatly increased, so that “ the whole house, as it were, is filled with the odour of the ointment.” O, Beloved, how pleasant is it for brethren to dwell together in unity ! As none could form a just conception of the odours of Aaron’s ointment, but those who came within the sphere of its influence, so none can form any adequate idea of the sweetness of love, but those on whom the Spirit of God has poured this divine unction. We may however see that this representation is just, even though we should not be able fully to comprehend it : for St. Paul, urging with all possible importunity the exercise of love, recommends it from the consideration of the comfort imparted by it : “ If there be any *comfort of love*, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.”]

But the Psalmist speaks of unity as being “ good,” as well as pleasant : and in his illustration of it in this view, he leads us to contemplate it,

II. As administering to our everlasting welfare—

The effect of dew in hot countries is exceedingly beneficial—

[In this country, where rains are frequent, we have comparatively little dew : but in hot countries, where the rains are periodical, the dew, as in Paradise, almost supplies the place of rain ^d. On Hermon, and on Zion, it came down in rich abundance. In its descent it was gentle ; but in its operation powerfully influential, reviving and invigorating every plant, and fertilizing the earth on every side.]

And such also is the influence of love on the souls of men—

[On Zion, “ God commanded his blessing ” in the days of old ; and on our Zion also he still commands it, “ even life for evermore.” But what is the principle whereby he operates this glorious change ? It is love, or “ faith working by love : ” “ Love is of God ; and every one that loveth, is born of God, and knoweth God : he that loveth not, knoweth not God : for God

^c Phil. ii. 1, 2.

^d Gen. ii. 4, 5.

is love." "God is love; and he that dwelleth in love, *dwelleth in God, and God in him.*" "If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, *and his love is perfected in us.*" It is by the exercise of this divine principle that "we know we have passed from death unto life;" and "by it we are recognized by all men as Christ's disciples^l." The proper operations of this principle are distinctly and fully marked in the First Epistle to the Corinthians^g; and they are most beautifully exemplified in the conduct of the primitive Christians^h. Such will every church be, where love reigns: the graces of the whole collective body will flourish with ever increasing beauty and fruitfulnessⁱ; and *that* will be verified which God promised previously to every sabbatic year, "I will command my blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth fruit for three years^k."

Say then, Whether Christian love and unity be not "*good?*" Say whether any thing in the universe can tend so much to the perfection of our nature as this; or whether there be any thing that will so advance us in a meetness for our heavenly inheritance? — — —]

APPLICATION—

[Cultivate then this heavenly principle. If you seek only *your own personal happiness*, there is nothing that will contribute to it like this — — — Nor will any thing so advance the welfare of the Church. Christians are one body in Christ: and when every member and every joint supplies its proper portion of this divine unction, "the whole body will grow unto the edifying of itself in love," and will in due time "attain the full measure of the stature of Christ^l" — — — And need I say, how *God will be glorified*, when his enemies are constrained to exclaim, "Behold, how these Christians love one another!" Guard then against every disposition contrary to love — — — And "if there be any among you who would cause divisions and offences, avoid them" — — — In mutual forbearance and forgiveness, follow the example of Christ himself^m — — — Thus shall you be fitted for those realms of love and joy, where all the countless multitudes of the redeemed unite in one harmonious song of praise to God and to the Lamb for ever and ever.]

^e 1 John iv. 7, 8, 12, 16.

^f 1 John iii. 14. and John xiii. 35.

^g 1 Cor. xiii. 4—7.

^h Acts iv. 32.

ⁱ Hos. xiv. 4—7.

^k Lev. xxv. 21.

^l Eph. iv. 13, 15, 16.

^m Eph. iv. 31, 32. and v. 1, 2.

DCCXXVIII.

A CALL TO ADORE GOD FOR HIS MERCY.

Ps. cxxxvi. 26. *O give thanks unto the God of heaven: for his mercy endureth for ever.*

PRAISE is the employment of heaven : and praise should be the employment of earth also. “Rejoice evermore,” is a special command of God : and to express our joy in praises and thanksgivings is equally commanded : “In every thing give thanks ; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.” The calls which are given us in the Psalms to the performance of this duty are very numerous : but in none more urgent than in the psalm before us. The particular object here proposed as the subject of our thanksgivings, is the mercy of God, which we are here called upon to *contemplate* and *adore*.

Let us then, in compliance with the Psalmist’s exhortation, endeavour,

I. To contemplate it—

Two things in particular respecting it we would propose to your consideration :

1. Its unbounded extent—

[The Psalmist, after speaking of mercy as constituting one of the most glorious perfections of the Deity^a, notices the manifestations of it which we behold in all the wonders of creation^b, and providence^c, and redemption^d. Whilst we acknowledge the hand of God in these things, we are but too apt to overlook *his mercy* as displayed in them. But on *this* we should principally fix our attention, as being most calculated to inflame our love and gratitude towards our heavenly Benefactor. Contemplate then the benefits which you receive from the sun, and moon, and stars, and from the infinitely diversified productions of this *terrestrial* globe — — — Then behold all the interpositions of God in behalf of his people Israel, and see in them what he is yet daily performing both for the bodies and souls of all who trust in him — — — Then, in the temporal redemptions vouchsafed to Israel under their most desperate and degraded states, behold the redemption of our souls from sin and Satan, death and hell, through the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ — — — Here are subjects of contemplation which might well occupy the mind of the highest archangel, and which therefore deserve *our* most serious attention.

But we would more particularly recommend to every one to consider the mercies which he himself has received : we would have every one trace them from his earliest infancy to the present moment : and, in reference to those interpositions of

^a ver. 1.

^b ver. 5—9.

^c ver. 10—22.

^d ver. 23, 24.

the Deity which appear to have been more conspicuous, we would recommend that they be inspected with peculiar care, *entering minutely into all the particulars of each, and viewing in each distinct particular the transcendent mercy of God.* Let the *psalm before us* be particularly noticed in this view as a *pattern*^e. When we take only a superficial view of things *in the general*, we remain unaffected by them: it is by entering into them *in the detail*, and dwelling on the minutest particulars, that we get our hearts properly affected by them. This therefore we would most earnestly recommend to all who would obtain a due sense of the mercies conferred upon them.

But we must not imagine that the dispensations which have been pleasing to flesh and blood have been our only mercies; for amongst our severest trials will be found, for the most part, our richest mercies. The successive trials of Joseph were of the most painful nature: yet they were all mercies in disguise. If we descend to more trifling incidents, such as Balaam's ass proving restive, and crushing his foot against a wall, and afterwards falling with him, they, as we know, were the very means by which his life was saved^f. Thus the things which grieve and irritate us at the time may be the most merciful dispensations that we could possibly have received: and we ought to receive them as expressions of God's love^g, sent to promote our good in this world^h, and to work for us an augmented weight of glory in the world to comeⁱ. Even the darkness and temptations with which our souls may be oppressed, must also be numbered among the means which God in his infinite mercy makes use of for the humbling and quickening, the sanctifying and saving, of our souls^k — — —]

2. Its everlasting duration—

[See how the mercy of God wrought in all the days of old, even from the foundation of the world! Precisely in the same manner it still operates, and shall ever continue to operate, towards all who fear his name^l — — — God will not withdraw it from those who are united unto Christ by faith^m — — — He may hide his face from them for a season; but with everlasting mercies will he gather themⁿ — — — *The repetition of this truth twenty-six times in as many verses* is a very sufficient pledge to us that "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance^o," and that "whom he loveth, he loveth to the end^p."]]

Having contemplated, though so imperfectly, the mercy of our God, we now call upon you,

^e ver. 9—22.

^f Numb. xxxiii. 22—33.

^g Heb. xii. 6.

^h Rom. viii. 28.

ⁱ 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18.

^k Isai. xxvii. 8, 9. and Hos. v. 15. and Ps. xxv. 10.

^l Ps. ciii. 17.

^m Ps. lxxxix. 28—36.

ⁿ Isai. liv. 7—10.

^o Rom. xi. 29.

^p John xiii. 1.

II. To adore it—

A tribute of praise and thanksgiving for such mercy is the least that can be demanded of us. And well may it be demanded; for,

1. It is due from us—

[Can we conceive, that, after all the mercies vouchsafed unto us, no return is required? Are we to be as stupid and insensible as beasts? Is this a state that becomes persons who have been redeemed by the blood of God's only dear Son? — — —

Perhaps it will be said by some, I have not yet obtained an interest in Christ: how then can I render thanks for what I have never received? To this we reply, Have you no *temporal* mercies for which to give thanks? and, if you are not yet partakers of *spiritual* mercies, have you no reason to thank God for the offer of them, and for not having been yet visited with the judgments which you have so richly merited? Think what is the state of millions who have not committed either more or greater sins than you; and what might at this moment have been your state also, if God in his infinite mercy had not spared you; and given you space for repentance? Do but think of this, and you will want no further incentive to gratitude and thanksgiving. But think also of the offers of salvation now made to you, a salvation free, and full, and everlasting: O! what thanks does this call for at your hands! What if one such offer were now made to those who are shut up under chains of everlasting darkness and despair; would no thanks be expressed by *them*? I call upon you then to give thanks unto the God of heaven, who yet waiteth to be gracious unto you, and "whose long-suffering you should account to be salvation."]

2. It is pleasing and acceptable to God—

[The acknowledgment so often repeated in the psalm before us has received more striking tokens of God's approbation than any other that was ever uttered by mortal man: David, knowing how acceptable it would be to God, appointed officers for the express purpose of repeating it in the service of the tabernacle^q. And, when Solomon had brought the ark of God into the sanctuary that he had prepared for it, and the priests were singing the praises of God in the very words of our text, at that moment, I say, did God descend into the sanctuary, so that the priests could no longer stand to minister there by reason of the overwhelming presence of the Divine glory^r. Another and no less remarkable testimony of God's approbation was that which was given to Jehoshaphat's use of these words at the time that he was going forth against three confederate armies: at the

^q 1 Chron. xvi. 41.

^r 2 Chron. v. 13.

very instant that the priests began to utter this acknowledgment, God set the three confederate armies against each other, and stirred them up to kill one another; till they were utterly destroyed, without any conflict on the part of Israel^s. What greater proof can we have of the delight which God feels in the exercise of mercy, and in commending it to the admiration of the whole universe? Begin then this song: continue this song throughout the day: let every fresh occurrence call forth fresh acknowledgments of the mercy of your God: and rest assured, that the more you abound in these expressions of your gratitude, the richer displays you shall have of the Divine glory, and the more entire victory over all your spiritual enemies.]

^s 2 Chron. xx. 21—23.

DCCXXIX.

GOD'S WORD MAGNIFIED.

Ps. cxxxviii. 2. *Thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.*

A DEVOUT mind will never want occasions for praising God: but there are some occasions whereon it will find peculiar liberty and enlargement. If, for instance, we have been in deep affliction; if we have had recourse to God in prayer; if we have laid hold on his promises, and pleaded them before him; and, in particular, if we have had them accomplished to our souls; this process prepares the mind, quickens it, elevates it, and so fills it, that it cannot but express its feelings in gratitude and praise.

David had, under some deep affliction, used these means for relief, and found their efficacy: "In the day when I cried, thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul^a." Constrained by a sense of this great mercy, he breaks forth into this devout acknowledgment: "I will praise thee with my whole heart: before the gods (that is, in the presence of all the great ones of the earth) will I sing praise unto thee. I will worship towards thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy loving-kindness and for thy truth (which, in this particular instance, thou hast so signally displayed:) for thou

^a ver. 3.

hast magnified thy word above all thy name;" and hast shewn that it shall infallibly be fulfilled to all who trust in it.

From these words I will take occasion to shew,

I. What honour God puts upon his word—

“He magnifies it above all his name,” that is, above every thing whereby he has made himself known to mortal man. He has revealed himself in part, by his works of Creation and Providence; but far more abundantly by his word. He has sent it to us,

1. As a mirror, to reflect his glory—

[“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handy-work^b.” “From them may his eternal power and Godhead be clearly seen^c.” In his providential dealings, also, is much of his wisdom and goodness exhibited. But of *his perfections*, generally, we can form no idea from these things: of *his purposes* we can know nothing. The state of the heathen world clearly attests this: for they behold the wonders of creation and providence, as well as we: “There is no speech nor language where *their* voice is not heard: their line is gone out into all the earth, and their words unto the end of the world^d.” But in the sacred volume all the glory of the Godhead shines: there we are admitted, so to speak, even to the council-chamber of the Most High; to hear the covenant entered into between the Father and the Son; the Father engaging to give to him a seed, whom he should have for his inheritance, if he, on his part, would “make his soul an offering for their sins,” and, *in their nature*, expiate the guilt of their iniquities^e. This mysterious transaction having taken place in the incarnation and death of the Lord Jesus Christ, we behold all the perfections of God united and harmonizing in a way that they never did, nor could, by any other means: we see justice more inexorable, than if it had executed vengeance on the whole human race; and mercy more abundant, than if it had spared the whole human race without any such atonement. There, as it is well expressed, “Mercy and truth are met together, and righteousness and peace kiss each other^f.” Of this great mystery we find not a trace in the whole creation besides: but in the word it is reflected, as in a mirror^g; and shines so bright, that the very angels around the throne are made wiser by the revelation of it to the Church^h.]

^b Ps. xix. 1.

^c Rom. i. 20.

^d Ps. xix. 3, 4.

^e Isai. liii. 10. with Ps. xl. 6—8.

^f Ps. lxxxv. 10.

^g 2 Cor. iii. 18.

^h Eph. iii. 10.

2. As a standard, to which every thing may be referred—

[Of God's will we know nothing, but from the word: "we know neither good nor evil from all that is before us." What God *requires of us*, nothing in creation or providence can inform us: what he will *do for us*, we cannot ascertain: how he will *deal with us* in the eternal world, we cannot learn. But, in the sacred volume, all is written as with a sun-beam. There is nothing which God expects us to do for him, which is not there most explicitly declared: nothing which he engages to do for us, that does not form the subject of a distinct promise. The whole of his procedure in the day of judgment is there laid open: the laws by which we shall be judged; the manner in which the testimony, whether against us or in our favour, shall be produced; the grounds on which the sentence of condemnation or acquittal shall be passed; yea, the very state to which every person, either as acquitted or condemned, shall be consigned; all is so clearly made known, that every person, who will judge himself with candour now, may assuredly anticipate his fate. There is nothing left to conjecture. Every man has a standard to which he may refer, for the rectifying of his judgment in every particular: so that nothing can be added, for the instruction of our minds, or the regulation of our future expectations.]

3. As a fountain, from whence all his blessings emanate—

[Great blessings, beyond all doubt, flow down to us through the works of creation and providence: in fact, they are incessantly administering to our welfare; for "God opens his hands, and fills all things living with plenteousness." Still, however, the benefits derived from them are only temporal; whereas those which the inspired volume imparts are spiritual and eternal: from thence we derive all our knowledge of divine truth, and all our hopes of everlasting salvation. Nor is it the knowledge only of truth that we obtain, but the operation and efficacy of it on our souls. There is in divine truth, when applied by the Holy Spirit, a power to wound, to heal, to sanctify, to saveⁱ. When it comes to the soul with power, the stoutest heart in the universe is made to tremble: when it is poured out as balm, the most afflicted creature under heaven is made to leap for joy. Look over the face of the globe, and see how many, who were once under the unrestrained dominion of sin, are now transformed into the image of their God. And then ascend to heaven, and behold the myriads of the redeemed around the throne of God, uniting their hallelujahs to God and

ⁱ Ps. xix. 7—11.

to the Lamb : to this state were they all brought by that blessed word, which alone could ever prevail for so great a work. Thus it is that God *has* magnified his word; and thus it is that he *will* magnify it to the end of time ; yea, through eternity will it be acknowledged as the one source of all the blessings that shall ever be enjoyed.]

Does God so honour his word ? Surely, then, we may see,

II. What honour *we* should put upon it—

I will here content myself with specifying only two particulars :

1. We should regulate ourselves altogether by it—

[We should know no other rule, either for our faith or practice. Whatever that speaks, we should receive with the most implicit confidence. Reason must judge whether there be sufficient evidence of its divine origin : but, that once admitted, the whole must be received by faith. We are not to be sitting in judgment on God's word, and saying, I cannot understand how there should be three persons in the God-head ; or how the Son should become incarnate ; or how the Holy Spirit should dwell in the heart of a believer ; or how we should be ultimately saved by a righteousness not our own. I say, we are not called to sit in judgment upon these things, but to receive them on the authority of God himself, who alone knows the manner of his own subsistence, or what is that mode of imparting salvation which is most suited to his own divine character.

If it be thought, that to expect a rational being so to submit his reason to the authority of revelation, is to require a sacrifice that is unworthy of him ; I answer, that *this* is the very way in which all human knowledge is acquired. What knows a child, for instance, respecting the elements of language ? You tell him, but in terms which he cannot comprehend, what grammar is, and what its rules are for the construction of language. What your instructions mean, he has no conception : but he takes for granted, that what you tell him is true : and from first receiving it simply on your authority, he comes, in time, to see that things *are* so, and *must be* so ; that there is, in fact, no other way of communicating any abstract idea ; and that, by that contrivance, we may open to the mind of another person the very inmost recesses of our own. Thus, in receiving the mysterious truths of God, we first take them on the authority of our Divine Teacher ; then, gradually finding that they correspond with our own experience, we see that they are precisely as they have been represented to us : then we come to find that they could not be otherwise : and, in the issue, we obtain

such views of their individual importance, their general harmony, and their mutual subserviency to the glory of God in the salvation of man, that we have no more doubt of them than of our own existence.

But it is not in speculative views that we must rest: we must, if we would indeed magnify the word, take it also as the rule of our conduct. We must not take offence at any thing because it requires more than we are disposed to yield: but, instead of lowering the command to our attainments, we must endeavour to elevate our attainments to it. The very "thoughts and imaginations of our hearts must be brought into obedience to God's blessed word;" and our whole souls be cast into it, as into a mould^k, not leaving a lineament in that unimpressed upon our souls, or retaining a feature upon our souls unconfined to that.

This is the way in which we are to honour the word; and to fail in any part of this, is to refuse it that entire submission which it requires at our hands.]

2. We should endeavour to circulate it to the very ends of the earth—

[This must follow as a matter of course. For, do we possess a *mirror* that reflects all the glory of our God; and shall we not desire that every human being may behold its light? Have we a *standard* to which every thing that is interesting to man may be referred; and shall we not give to the whole world the advantage of it? Have we a *fountain* from whence all imaginable blessings flow; and shall we keep it to ourselves, and not endeavour to impart its blessings to every child of man? Surely we must rather pant for an opportunity to make it known to the whole world. We must strive to circulate it through every country under heaven, whether civilized or savage: we must be ready to engage in translating it into every language in the world, in order that all men may be able to read in their own tongue the wonderful works of God. To preach it, too, we should account our highest honour, though it be amongst the most uncivilized nations of the earth: nor let it be thought that the most transcendent talents can be applied to any better purpose than this. On the contrary, the more eminent any person's talents are, the more would we urge him to consecrate them to the blessed work of translating this sacred volume into languages in which it has never yet appeared, and of instructing his fellow-creatures who are yet sitting in darkness and the shadow of death. Even an angel from heaven accounts it an honour to carry this book through the vast expanse of heaven, "to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people^l." Let it not then be thought an occupation

^k Rom. vi. 17. The Greek.

^l Rev. xiv. 6.

unworthy of *us*; and, whilst we are earnestly praying to God that he would send forth his light and his truth to every quarter of the globe, let us, by every possible means, endeavour to promote this glorious and blessed object. Let us first seek to have “the word of Christ dwelling richly in all wisdom” in our own souls, and then labour that “it may have free course, and be glorified” throughout the earth.]

DCCXXX.

ANSWERS TO PRAYER.

Ps. cxxxviii. 3. *In the day when I cried thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul.*

THE blessed word of God abounds with promises, with promises of all that we can need, grace, mercy, peace, strength, victory. But will these promises be so performed, that a poor sinful man like ourselves shall be conscious of the performance of them to his own soul? Here is the peculiar excellency of the Book of Psalms; in which we have a record of David’s own experience. We see in this book a faithful delineation of a man’s intercourse with his Maker; and, in the words which I have read, a testimony that God had fulfilled his word, yea, and “magnified it above all his name.”

Let us consider,

I. David’s testimony to the compassion of his God—

David was in the habit of spreading all his wants before God—

[Exceedingly had he been tried from his youth up. With such unrelenting malignity was he persecuted by Saul, that nothing but a direct interposition of the Deity could preserve him — — — But he committed his cause to God in prayer — — — And when no hope, according to human appearances, remained to him, “he encouraged himself in the Lord his God^a.”]

And from God he received many signal answers to prayer—

[Of this he testifies with much joy and gratitude^b — — — In my text, he particularly declares that God’s answers to his prayers had been both *speedy* and *effectual*. “In the very day that he cried, God had answered him,” when he was shut up

^a 1 Sam. xxx. 6.

^b Ps. xviii. 4—6. and xxxiv. 3—6.

in the city of Keilah. He had heard that Saul was coming to besiege him there; and he had reason to fear that the men of Keilah would deliver him up into the hands of Saul. On both these points he sought information from the Lord, who knew perfectly not only what designs actually existed in the minds of men, but what would be formed under any circumstances which might occur. Here was no time for delay: nor did God delay to give him the information he desired. Thus, through the speed with which his prayer was answered, his life, together with that of his followers, was preserved^c. Exceeding abundant, too, had been God's gracious communications to him in answer to his prayer. Any man who was not miraculously sustained by God would have sunk under the weight of his afflictions, or at least would have availed himself of the opportunities which were repeatedly afforded him of terminating them by the death of his inveterate enemy. But, though urged to it by his own friends, he would in no wise consent to such a method of extricating himself from his calamities^d. Well might he say, as in my text, "Thou strengthenedst me with strength in my soul:" for, if not strengthened in a very extraordinary degree from on high, he never could have maintained such a conduct as this.]

When we see such a testimony as this, it becomes us to consider,

II. The instruction to be derived from it—

It would be impossible in one discourse, or in many, to unfold all the important lessons that are to be learned from this testimony: I will, therefore, confine myself to two:

1. The efficacy of prayer—

[O that this were duly considered! How urgent should we be at the throne of grace! Who amongst us should not be able to bear the same testimony with David, if, like him, we habituated ourselves to fervent and believing prayer? Never did God say to any, "Seek ye my face in vain." No: he is "a God that heareth prayer." "The prayer of the upright is his delight." And such is the efficacy of it, when poured out in faith, that, when he had determined to punish Israel for their iniquities, he forbade Moses to intercede for them: saying, "*Let me alone, that I may consume them;*" that is, 'If you intercede for them, you will bind my hands, so that I cannot execute the threatened vengeance: and, therefore, let me alone, that I may be free to act.' Be assured, Brethren, that whilst you have a heart to pray, God has an ear to hear, and answer.

^c 1 Sam. xxiii. 9—12. ^d 1 Sam. xxiv. 4—7. and xxvi. 7—12.

David succeeded by “worshipping towards God’s holy Temple^e :” and shall not you, if you direct your prayer to *Him whom the Temple typified*, even the Lord Jesus Christ? Shall it be in vain to supplicate your incarnate God, or to go to the Father in the name of his dear Son? Try it; and you shall soon have to say with David, “I will praise thee with my whole heart: before the gods will I sing praise unto thee: for in the day when I cried, thou answeredst me^f.” Yes, you shall understand, by sweet experience, the truth of that promise, “It shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear^g.” Nay, more, your God will do for you not only what you ask, but “exceeding abundantly above all that you can ask or think.”]

2. The use and intent of trials—

[We are apt to regard them as enemies that are greatly to be dreaded; (and, no doubt, “they are not for the present joyous, but grievous:”) but they are indeed blessings in disguise. They are often sent to quicken us to prayer; to make us feel our dependence on God; and to discover to us the abundance of his condescension and grace. What would David have known of God comparatively, if he had not been placed in circumstances of great difficulty, where none but God could help him, and where God, in answer to his prayers, appeared for his support? No man ever more abounded in praises than he; but they all had their foundation in the deliverances vouchsafed in answer to his prayers. When, therefore, any trial comes, say with yourselves, Now God is preparing me for richer discoveries of his own glory; and if he make me to feel my own weakness, it is only that he may “perfect his own strength in and by that weakness.” Fear not, then, to go into any depths; since from them shall your prayer come up, even as Jonah’s did, into the ears of the Most High; and God will take you from them, to set your feet upon a rock, and to fill you with praises and thanksgivings to him for the manifestations of his love^h.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who restrain prayer before God—

[The generality know not what prayer is, but content themselves with reading or reciting a form in which they feel no interest — — — And of those who have on some particular occasions called upon his name, how many relapse into a cold and formal state, as though they had ceased to need the blessings which they once solicited! Alas! what enemies are both of these characters to the real welfare of their own souls! They are enemies even to their present happiness, and much more

^e ver. 2. ^f ver. 1. ^g Isai. lxxv. 24. ^h Ps. xl. 1—3.

to their happiness in the world to come. This I must say to all persons of this description: "You have not, because you ask not:" nor can you ever have pardon, or peace, or holiness, or glory, in any way but in that of humble, fervent, and believing prayer. You must "open your mouth wide," if ever you would have it "filled" with spiritual and eternal blessings.]

2. Those who can unite in David's testimony respecting the compassion of their God—

[Go on, and "pray without ceasing." There never is a day when you cease to need a supply of spiritual good; and never shall your importunity displease your God. "Be not straitened in yourselves, and never shall you find that you are straitened in him." Live a life of prayer, and you shall never be disappointed of your hopeⁱ. Be instant in prayer, and you may say with David, "Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me^k." You may add, too, with equal confidence, "The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me^l." What delightful thoughts are these! and how will you "sing in the ways of the Lord^m," when your mind is so occupied! This is the proper walk of a Christian; and every communication received from God, in answer to your prayers, shall be an earnest and foretaste of yet richer blessings in the realms of bliss.]

ⁱ Isai. xl. 31.^k ver. 7.^l ver. 8.^m ver. 5.

DCCXXXI.

THE GOSPEL A SOURCE OF HAPPINESS.

Ps. cxxxviii. 4, 5. *All the kings of the earth shall praise thee, O Lord, when they hear the words of thy mouth. Yea, they shall sing in the ways of the Lord: for great is the glory of the Lord.*

IN the Psalms of David, it is often not easy to find out the connexion between the different parts, so as to reduce them to the form of a regular composition. The inspired writer seems on many occasions to have recorded the feelings of his soul without any particular attention to order and method; and sometimes, unconsciously as it were, to have passed from what respected his own personal concerns, to events far distant, relating to the Church of God under the reign of the Messiah. If we suppose the psalm before us to have been written soon after his establishment on the throne of Israel, we may regard the words of my text as expressing the satisfaction which that

event would afford to all the surrounding nations, when they should hear of the wonderful events by which it had been accomplished. But it is manifest, that, if that be in any degree the import of his words, it can never comprehend their full meaning. Beyond a doubt, the holy man is led, from the contemplation of the mercies vouchsafed to himself, to speak of those which shall be vouchsafed to the whole world in the millennial age; when all the kings of the earth shall become the monuments of God's love and mercy, and shall walk joyfully before him in obedience to his will.

From the words thus explained, I will take occasion to shew,

I. The felicity of the latter day—

Here we see,

1. Of whom the Church will be composed—

[Under the Jewish dispensation, it was confined almost exclusively to the descendants of Abraham and the twelve Patriarchs, or, I should rather say, to a very small remnant of them: for “they were not all Israel who were of Israel^a.” And since the Gospel kingdom has been established, the true Israel have been found chiefly amongst “the poor, whom God has more especially chosen to be rich in faith, and heirs of his kingdom^b.” As in the Apostle's days, so at this time, “not *many* wise men after the flesh, not *many* mighty, not *many* noble are called^c.” But in the millennial age, persons of every rank, and of every nation under heaven, will flock to Christ, even “as doves to their windows;” as the Psalmist says: “All the ends of the earth shall remember themselves, and turn unto the Lord, and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before him^d.” Amongst these, the kings and governors shall bear a most conspicuous place; all of them, instead of being found, as formerly, amongst the persecutors of the Lord's people, “bringing their glory into the Church^e,” and “becoming themselves her nursing-fathers, and their queens her nursing-mothers^f.” Nor shall this obtain amongst a few only: for “the kings of Tarshish and of the Isles shall bring presents to our adorable Redeemer; the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts unto him; yea, all kings shall fall down before him; and all nations shall serve him^g.”]

^a Rom. ix. 6.

^b Jam. ii. 5.

^c 1 Cor. i. 26.

^d Ps. xxii. 27. and lxxxvi. 9.

^e Rev. xxi. 24.

^f Isai. xlix. 22, 23.

^g Ps. lxxii. 10, 11.

2. What will be the frame of their minds—

[Little as the praise of our Redeemer is now heard, it will be proclaimed then by all: the praises of our God will resound in every place, and universal joy be diffused amongst the servants of the Lord. The noise, that is now accounted mirth, will cease; and the revellings, which are now regarded as sources and scenes of joy, will be put away as unworthy of the Christian profession. There will then be nobler sources of delight opened to the whole Christian world; and all of every rank will find their chief happiness in the service of their God. This is the testimony of all the inspired writers; who uniformly concur in this, that it will be a season of universal joy; men every where “coming with singing unto Zion, and with everlasting joy upon their heads; all of them being filled with joy and gladness; and sorrow and sighing having fled away^h.”]

3. What discoveries they will have of God—

[No wonder their happiness will be so exalted, when God shews forth his glory in the midst of them. “Great will then be the glory of the Lord,” as displayed in the person, and work, and offices of Christ, and in the manifestations of his love to the souls of men — — — Yes, “when the Lord shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his gloryⁱ.” And great indeed will be the splendour of that day: “The moon will be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the Lord of Hosts shall reign in Mount Zion, and before his ancients, gloriously^k.”]

Yet let us not imagine that these blessings are so reserved for future ages, as not to be enjoyed in our day. No: we are in reality as much interested in them as men can be at any period of the world: and therefore I call upon you to contemplate,

II. The felicity which we also are privileged to enjoy—

1. The word which they of the latter day will hear, is preached unto us—

[The Gospel was in a measure preached to Abraham^l; but how much more to *us*! By Christ and his holy Apostles God has made known to us his mind and will without reserve; nor have we any reason whatever to think that any addition shall ever be made to the inspired volume. Further light, indeed, will be thrown upon it, by the fulfilment of prophecy; and a more abundant effusion of the Holy Spirit will be vouchsafed to men, for the comprehension of it: but the entire Gospel is vouchsafed to us, as much as it ever will be to them; and, if we pray to God for the teaching of his Holy

^h Isai. xxxv. 10. ⁱ Ps. cii. 16. ^k Isai. xxiv. 23. ^l Gal. iii. 8.

Spirit, we have no reason to doubt but that we shall be guided into all truth, even as they. Beloved Brethren, you hear of a Saviour, and of all the wonders of redeeming love. The salvation of Christ is set before you, in all its freeness, in all its fulness, in all its suitableness, in all its excellency and glory. The grounds of joy are made known to you, even as they were by the Apostles themselves to those to whom they ministered: so that, in this respect, it may be truly said, that “nothing that could be profitable is kept back from you,” but that “unto you is declared all the counsel of God.”]

2. And have not we the same interest in it as they?

[Yes, surely; and if we have been enlightened by it, we have as much reason for praise and gratitude and joy as ever they can have. Tell me, ye who have been redeemed from death and hell, and that too by the blood of your incarnate God, tell me whether every feeling of your souls should not be swallowed up in joy, and every word of your lips be only praise? It is a shame to the Christian world that religion is at so low an ebb amongst them. Truly, Brethren, the lukewarmness that obtains amongst the professors of the present day is highly discreditable to us, and reflects dishonour on the Gospel itself. Why are we not “singing in the ways of the Lord?” Why go we not on our way, rejoicing, all the day long? Is it not said of true Christians, that, “though they have never seen Christ, yet, believing in him, they rejoice in him with joy unspeakable and full of glory^m?”

I will further add,]

3. Does not the Lord manifest to you also his glory?

[Yes, verily, “the glory of God shines as truly as ever, in the face of Jesus Christ;” and shall be manifested unto you, even as it was in the Apostolic, or shall be in the Millennial, age, if only you will seek him with your whole hearts. Blessed be God! there are, even at this day, some at least “to whom Christ is precious;” some who behold him as “the brightness of his Father’s glory, and the express image of his personⁿ;” and who, “beholding his glory, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of Lord^o.” And why should one amongst you remain destitute of this blessing? There is not so much as one amongst you all to whom Christ would not come in the most endearing manner, if you would but seek him^p. If only you would, with Moses, say, “Lord, shew me thy glory,” “He would make all his goodness to pass before your eyes^q.”]

^m 1 Pet. i. 8.

ⁿ Heb. i. 3.

^o 2 Cor. iii. 18.

^p John xiv. 23.

^q Exod. xxxiii. 18, 19.

To all of you, then, I would ADDRESS the following requests:—

1. Seek to form a right estimate of religion—

[Religion is not, as too many imagine, a source of melancholy, but a fountain of unutterable joy^r. If it deprive you of carnal delights, it will give you infinitely richer and purer pleasures in their stead — — —]

2. Endeavour to get an experimental acquaintance with it in your own souls—

[Be not satisfied with speculative views of divine truth; but get such a sense of it as shall fill your mouth with praise, and cause you to “sing in the ways of the Lord” all the day long. The command to *you*, as much as to any child of man, is, “Rejoice evermore: rejoice in the Lord always; and again, I say, rejoice” — — —]

3. Labour to circulate the knowledge of it through the whole world—

[Blessed be God! the higher ranks are now beginning to mingle their praises with those of the other classes of the community. The circulation of the word of God, and the sending forth of missionaries to explain and enforce it, are now objects of solicitude to an extent that they have never been, since the days of the Apostles. Unite then, all of you, in this blessed work; and cease not, till “all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.”]

^r Prov. iii. 17.

DCCXXXII.

GOD'S VIEWS OF THE LOWLY AND OF THE PROUD.

Ps. cxxxviii. 6. *Though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off.*

WHATEVER we find in Scripture to have been God's dealings with his people of old, the same may we expect to receive from him at this day, so far as our situation and circumstances require it. His interpositions, either in a way of chastisement or protection, may be less visible than formerly; but they are neither less certain, nor less real. We may imagine, that, because we are not under a Theocracy, as the Jews were, we are not authorized to believe that the great God of heaven and earth will interest himself about *us*: but in every age “his eyes are still

both upon the evil and the good ;” and “ though he be high, yet will he have respect unto the lowly : but the proud he will behold afar off.”

In this declaration of the Psalmist we see,

I. A truth acknowledged^a—

[God is high, even “ the high and lofty One who inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy ^b.” “ Heaven is his throne, and earth his footstool ^c.” “ The heaven of heavens cannot contain him ^d.” “ He dwelleth in light which no man can approach unto ; and him no man hath seen, or can see ^e.” His greatness is displayed in all the works of creation, which sprang into existence at his command ^f — — — In all the works of Providence, also, is it manifested ^g ; for “ in him all things live, and move, and have their being ^h” — — —

We may say, then, respecting him, that “ He is great, and greatly to be feared ; and that his greatness is unsearchable ⁱ.”]

This truth being unquestionable, let us consider,

II. The proper bearing of it on the different classes of mankind—

Because of the greatness of the divine Majesty, both good men and wicked, though on different principles, imagine, that he will not condescend to notice *them* ; the good, from a sense of their own unworthiness ; and the wicked, from an idea that it would derogate from God's honour to concern himself about the affairs of men. But he will notice, and in a way suited to the characters of each,

1. “ The lowly” —

[As David, in reference to the temple which he desired to build, said, “ Will God in very deed dwell with man on the earth ? ” so persons under a sense of their own sinfulness are often ready to think that God will never listen to *their* prayer, or deign in any way to notice *them* ^k — — — But greatly are they mistaken : for “ though the Lord be high, yet will he have respect unto the lowly ; ” yea, if there were but one contrite soul in the universe, God would look through all the shining

^a This part of the subject, though essential to a just view of the whole, should be passed over very briefly ; the *bearing of it* being the main point to be insisted on.

^b Isai. lvii. 15. ^c Isai. lxvi. 1. ^d 1 Kings viii. 27. ^e 1 Tim. vi. 16.

^f and ^g—These are opened at great length by God himself, Job xxxviii. to xli. But the bare mention of the passage will be sufficient.

^h Acts xvii. 28.

ⁱ Ps. cxlv. 3.

^k Ps. viii. 4.

ranks of angels that surround his throne, to behold that favoured object: nay, more; he would come down from the highest heavens to visit and revive him. He would even make that man's bosom his habitation. And though the man's state on earth were so abject, that he had no better place whereon to rest his weary limbs than "a dunghill, yet would God raise him from thence, to set him among the princes in his kingdom^l." *Such respect would God shew him, that his every prayer should be heard, and his every desire, so far as it was for his good, be granted^m.* The very sighs of such an one would be as music in the ears of the Most High God; and "his every tear be treasured up in Jehovah's vialsⁿ," as a most valued monument of his creature's love.]

2. "The proud"—

[Such are they who have no consciousness of their ill desert, no deep contrition on account of it— — These, from a mistaken view of the divine Majesty, are ready to exclude Jehovah from the concerns of this lower world, as though they were beneath his notice^o. Whereas, there is nothing great or small in the eyes of Jehovah; nor is it any more degradation to him to attend to the concerns of the smallest insect that floats invisibly in the air, than to the affairs of the mightiest empire upon earth. But, in fact, these persons *wish* to be from under the cognizance of the Most High: they have no desire that he should inspect their hearts, or interfere in any of their concerns. But God takes notice of them and of their ways, no less than the ways of others; and records in the book of his remembrance all their proud thoughts, and their atheistical imaginations. "He knows them afar off," with holy indignation. No access have they to him; no gracious communications from him. "The lowly" can say, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." But not so "the proud." They may come, like the Pharisee, to the very altar of God, to tell God how good they are; but it is the self-abasing Publican alone that goes away justified, or receives any tokens of God's approval. In death, too, the proud will be left, if not a prey to terror, yet, at all events, without any sense of redeeming love, or any foretaste of that blessedness which is the exclusive portion of the contrite and believing soul. And, O! what will be his reception in the eternal world? There, indeed, will God "know him afar off," and dismiss him from his presence with that indignant reproof, "Depart from me: I never knew thee, thou worker of iniquity^p."]]

APPLICATION—

1. Look well to your own character, as before God—

^l Ps. cxiii. 4—8.

^m Ps. cxlv. 19.

ⁿ Ps. lvi. 8.

^o Zeph. i. 12.

^p Matt. vii. 23.

[It is not by your outward actions merely that you will be judged at the last day, but by the dispositions and habits of your mind. He that stands high in his own estimation will be proportionably low in God's esteem; whilst the lowly will be approved of God, in proportion as he is abased in his own eyes^a. The parable of the Pharisee and the Publican sufficiently evinces this. The one had made great attainments in religion, and was free from every thing that could be a subject of self-reproach; whilst the other had shewn no attention whatever to religion, and had probably committed many great evils: yet the one, being penitent, was accepted; and the other, being unhumbled, was dismissed with utter disapprobation and abhorrence. I would, therefore, particularly entreat you to examine to which of the two, in the habit of your mind, you are assimilated. And I would have you also carefully to distinguish between the spirit of a creature and the feelings of a sinner: for there are many who have a consciousness of their *insignificance as creatures*, whilst they have very little sense of their *guiltiness as sinners*; and hence are looking for acceptance through their own works, instead of relying simply and altogether upon the Lord Jesus Christ. I say again, This will enter deeply into God's estimate of your character at the last day; and, therefore, it must form a most essential part of your inquiry into your own state at this time.]

2. Expect that God's dealings with you will be in perfect accordance with it—

[To all eternity will the declaration in my text be fulfilled. There will be no bounds to "the respect that shall be paid to the lowly" at the day of judgment. They shall be owned by that Saviour in whom they had believed; and be placed on his right hand, as distinguished monuments of his favour. To heaven itself also shall they be exalted, as heirs of the Saviour's kingdom, and as partners of his throne for ever and ever. On the other hand, most tremendous will be the aspect of the Saviour's countenance towards the proud, impenitent, and unhumbled sinners. They have despised him, and all the wonders of his love; and now, they themselves shall be banished from his presence with righteous scorn and contempt. They were too good in their own estimation to flee to him for mercy: and now they shall have no part in his salvation, nor any other doom than what their own works have merited. Would to God that the contemners of the Gospel salvation would consider this, ere it be too late! The great and glorious "God willeth not the death of any sinner, but rather that he would turn from his wickedness, and live:" nor is there a creature in the universe

^a Luke xiv. 11.

whom he would not most gladly receive to mercy. But he will never depart from what he has spoken, that “whoso covereth his sins, shall not prosper; but that he who confesseth and forsaketh them, shall have mercy.”]

DCCXXXIII.

GOD'S CARE OF HIS PEOPLE.

Ps. cxxxviii. 8. *The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me.*

THE deeper doctrines of our holy religion, if made a matter of controversy and disputation, are very unprofitable; but, as experienced in the soul, they are a source of the richest consolation. David, under the persecutions of Saul, stood in need of consolation; and he found it in the consideration of God's power and faithfulness. He was at this time in great trouble. But, in the full confidence that God would take care of him, he said, “Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me: thou shalt stretch forth thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies, and thy right hand shall save me. The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me.”

Let us, for our own improvement of these words, consider,

I. The confidence here expressed—

Let us notice it,

1. In reference to David—

[In their primary sense, the words refer to David's final establishment on the throne of Israel. But the whole psalm shews that he had a further view to his spiritual and eternal interests. In reference to his temporal advancement, his confidence was well-founded. God had promised to him the throne of Israel. The only question, therefore, for him to settle in his own mind, was, whether God was able to effect his promised mercy. But here he could have no doubt. True it was, that Saul laboured with all his might for his destruction: but it was not possible for man to thwart the purposes of the Almighty; and therefore, relying on the power and faithfulness of Jehovah, he dismissed all fear, and assured himself of a happy and successful issue to his afflictions. In reference to his eternal welfare, it was equally just. God had “made with him an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure^a.” This covenant

^a 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

comprehended every thing for body and for soul, for time and for eternity. Could it be supposed that God should ever violate his own engagements, or be incapacitated through the power or subtlety of men or devils for the fulfilment of them? In spite of all the efforts of Saul, and all the devices of the wicked one, they had been accomplished hitherto; and there was no reason to fear that "one jot or tittle of his word should ever fail."]

2. In reference to ourselves—

[We have the same difficulties to contend with as he. We have not indeed a human enemy, pursuing us unto death: but we have a more formidable enemy, even "Satan, who, as a roaring lion, goeth about, seeking," by every means within his power, "to devour us^b." Thousands are in league with him on every side; and within our own bosoms are there enemies innumerable, who are ready to betray us. According to human appearances, our escape is impossible. But we may, notwithstanding all, possess the fullest confidence of a triumphant issue. Our grounds of confidence, also, are the same as his. The covenant of grace is made with us, and with the Lord Jesus Christ in our behalf. In that covenant, God undertakes for us, as well as for himself: he engages that "he will not depart from us to do us good; and that he will put his fear in our hearts, that we may not depart from him^c." Now we may well say, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" That HE should change, is impossible; for "He is a God that changeth not^d." And, because we are apt to doubt his veracity, he has confirmed his promise with an oath, "that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge, to lay hold on the hope set before us^e." On these grounds, therefore, we may with the holy Apostle, "be confident of this very thing, that He who hath begun a good work in us will perform it till the day of Christ^f."]

But let us further mark,

II. The conduct to which it should lead us—

It should lead us to precisely the same spirit as he manifested: with a view to which, I would say,

1. Look for progress in the Divine life—

[David looked to God to "perfect all that concerned him." So should we, also, "go on unto perfection." We should never count ourselves to have attained, as long as any thing remains to be attained. Whatever progress we may have already made, we should "forget the things which are behind, and reach forth

^b 1 Pet. v. 8.

^c Jer. xxxii. 40.

^d Mal. iii. 6.

^e Heb. vi. 18.

^f Phil. i. 6.

unto that which is before, and press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus^g.”]

2. Let your dependence be on God alone—

[It was to God alone that David looked for the “perfecting” of all his concerns. And to God alone must you look. No dependence whatever must be placed on your own wisdom or strength. It is “God who has wrought all your works in you” hitherto^h: and he who has been “the Author, must also be the Finisherⁱ.” “The same hand as laid the foundation of the good work, must bring forth the top-stone, that Grace, grace, may be ascribed to it,” for ever and ever^k.]

3. Blend your confidence with fear—

[The confidence which David expressed did not supersede the necessity of holy fear. On the contrary, at the very moment that he so expressed it, he cried, “Forsake not the work of thine own hands^l!” It was thus with the Apostle Paul. No man ever had stronger confidence in God than he: yet “he kept under his body, and brought it into subjection, lest by any means, after having preached to others, he himself should become a cast-away^m.” Extremely important do I consider this suggestion. For, amongst those who express this confidence in God, many think themselves at liberty to relax their vigilance; taking for granted, that God will keep them, whether they labour to “keep themselvesⁿ” or not. But this is an abuse, and a very fatal abuse, of the doctrines of grace. The assistance promised us by God, is intended to *encourage*, not to *supersede*, our own endeavours: as it is said, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who worketh in you, to will and to do of his good pleasure^o.” To every one amongst you, then, whatever his attainments be, I say, “Be not high-minded, but fear^p:” for “blessed is the man that feareth alway^q.” Whilst you say with David, “The Lord will command his loving-kindness in the day-time, and in the night his song shall be with me;” be sure to add, “My prayer shall be unto the God of my life^r.”]

4. Unite with fear, a firm unshaken confidence—

[Arduous as David’s circumstances were, he entertained no doubt respecting their final issue. He looked to “God, as performing all things for him^s,” and was satisfied. Now, in like manner, I would have you “encourage yourselves in the Lord your God.” Treasure up in your minds “his exceeding great and precious promises,” and expect the accomplishment of them all to your souls. He has said, that “he will never leave you;

^g Phil. iii. 12—14.

^h Isai. xxvi. 12.

ⁱ Heb. xii. 2.

^k Zech. iv. 9.

^l ver. 8.

^m 1 Cor. ix. 27.

ⁿ Jude, ver. 21.

^o Phil. ii. 12, 13.

^p Rom. xi. 20.

^q Prov. xxviii. 14.

^r Ps. xlii. 8.

^s Ps. lvii. 2.

never, never forsake you^t:" and you may rest assured that he will fulfil his word; for "He is faithful who hath promised^u." "Cast, then, your care altogether upon him^x;" and "commit the keeping of your souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator^y."

^t Heb. xiii. 5. ^u Heb. x. 23. ^x 1 Pet. v. 7. ^y 1 Pet. iv. 19.

DCCXXXIV.

THE OMNIPRESENCE AND OMNISCIENCE OF GOD.

Ps. cxxxix. 1—12. *O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my down-sitting and mine up-rising; thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compasses my path, and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways: for there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.*

DAVID was a man bitterly persecuted and greatly calumniated. Nothing could exceed the acrimony with which Saul pursued him to take away his life. But David had the comfort of a good conscience: and he often appealed to the heart-searching God to attest his innocence of those crimes that were laid to his charge. It is probable that such were his circumstances when he composed this psalm; and that, when traduced by men, he consoled himself with the reflection, that every thought of his heart was fully known to God. The sentiments are delivered in an immediate address to the Deity himself: and they are such as ought to be deeply impressed on every mind.

Let us in our comment on this passage consider,

I. The truths here acknowledged—

David asserts in a most solemn manner the omnipresence of the Deity—

[Certain it is, that God is everywhere present. “If we should go up to heaven, he is there; or down to the grave or the abodes of departed spirits, he is there.” There is no point of space where he is not, or where he is not as wholly and entirely present as in heaven itself. “The heavens cannot contain him.” He himself puts the question to every child of man; “Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord^a.” It is in vain therefore for us to think of hiding ourselves from him, since in every place “he besets us both behind and before, and so lays his hand upon us,” that it is not possible for us to escape. He is present with us, “to lead us,” if we seek his guidance; or “to hold us,” if we would attempt to run from him.]

Together with the omnipresence of the Deity, the Psalmist further asserts also his omniscience—

[The eyes of God are continually upon the ways of the children of men. What men know only by searching, God knows by a single glance of his eye, and as perfectly, as if he had “searched” with the utmost care and diligence into the minutest parts and circumstances of every transaction. Even the thoughts, yea, and every imagination of the thoughts of men’s hearts, are open to him, together with the whole frame and habit of our minds. Are we retiring to rest, or lying upon our bed, or rising from thence after our night’s repose? he knows precisely in what state we are. He sees whether we are calling our ways to remembrance, and humbling ourselves before him, and imploring mercy at his hands, together with grace that we may serve him more acceptably; or whether our minds be running out after earthly objects, and occupied about the things of time and sense. Do we go forth to our respective callings? he sees by what motives we are actuated, and by what principles we are governed. Whatever fraud we may practise in our dealings with men, or whatever artifice we may use to promote our own interests, he is privy to it: on the other hand, whatever dispositions we may exercise, or actions we may perform, for the glory of his name, he beholds them also. We may be so unostentatious, that even our right hand may not know what our left hand doeth: but he knoweth it, and marks it with his special favour. So likewise in the public assemblies of his people, he sees whether in our devotions we be humble, fervent, and believing; or whether we have a mere form of godliness, without the power of it. In a word, wherever we be, in public or in private, he knoweth infinitely more of us than the best-instructed Christian in the universe can know of

^a Jer. xxiii. 23, 24.

himself: "Such knowledge is too wonderful for us; we cannot attain unto it." As for light or darkness, it makes no difference to him: "the night and the day to him are both alike." "All things" without exception, even the most hidden recesses of the heart, "are naked and open before him;" as the inmost parts of the sacrifices, when cut down the back-bone, were to the priest appointed to inspect them^b.]

These are solemn truths: and the importance of them will forcibly appear, whilst we suggest,

II. Some reflections naturally arising from them—

On this subject we might multiply reflections without end, seeing that there is not any part of a Christian's experience which is not most intimately connected with it. But we will confine ourselves to two; namely,

1. That many, however high they may be in their own estimation, will be found most awfully to have deceived themselves in the last day—

[Among the foremost of these are *the ungodly and profane*. These, with an atheistical contempt of God, go on in their own way, saying, "Tush, God shall not see, neither shall the Almighty regard it:" "How doth God know? can he judge through the dark cloud? Thick clouds are a covering to him, that he seeth not^c." But how will they be surprised in the day of judgment, to find, that not one single act, word, or thought of their whole lives had escaped the notice of the Deity! They, if no human eye beheld them, prosecuted their licentious pleasures without fear; little thinking Who was present, beholding their every act, hearing their every word, noting their every thought. Had but a child been present, they could not have proceeded with such indifference: but Jehovah's presence they regarded not, any more than if he had been, like the heathen gods, unknowing, unconscions, unconcerned. Truly, it is a fearful account which they will have to give, when they shall see the long catalogue of their crimes written with unerring accuracy, and brought forward against them as the ground of their eternal condemnation.

Next to these are *the proud formalists*, who, because they have never run to any excess of riot, applaud themselves as righteous and secure of the Divine favour. But whilst they boast of their negative righteousness and their performance of some external duties, and look with contempt upon those who have been less moral than themselves, little do they think in

^b Heb. iv. 12, 13. τετραχηλισμένα. See also Jer. xvi. 17. and Job xxxiv. 22.

^c Job xxii. 13, 14. Ps. lxxiii. 11.

what a different light they are viewed by “ God, who knoweth their hearts; in whose sight that which is highly esteemed amongst men is not unfrequently an utter abomination^d.” Very different is the standard by which he estimates them, from that by which they estimate themselves. The things for which he looks are, a tenderness of spirit, a lowliness of mind, a brokenness of heart, a deep self-loathing and self-abhorrence; not one atom of which has he ever seen in these self-applauding Pharisees. Say, thou formal moralist, when did the heart-searching God ever see thee weeping for thy sins, and smiting on thy breast, like the repenting publican, and fleeing to Christ as the manslayer to the city of refuge? When did he ever hear thee adoring and magnifying him for the exceeding riches of his grace in Christ Jesus? Know that He can discern between true and false religion, whether thou canst or not; and that it is “ not he who commendeth himself, that shall be approved in the judgment, but he whom the Lord commendeth.”

But of all self-deceiving people, there are none who have so much reason to tremble at the idea of God’s omniscience as *the false and hypocritical professor*. True, if there were ten thousand of this complexion present, not one would apply the title to himself, or suppose himself to be comprehended under this head. Yet are there many such in the Church of God; many, whose religion consists in hearing and talking about the Gospel, rather than in exercising the spirit it inculcates. If a zeal about certain tenets, or running to hear sermons, or putting themselves forward in religious meetings, or sitting in judgment upon others who are not of their party, if this were religion, they would be very eminent: but if religion consist in humility of mind, in meekness and lowliness of heart, in patience and forbearance towards those who differ from them, in a diligent attention to the duties of their place and station, and in a secret walk with God, they will be found most awfully wanting in them all. Alas! the religion of many makes them not a whit more amiable and lovely in their dispositions and habits, than if they had never heard of “ the example of Christ:” on the contrary, their pride, and conceit, and forwardness, and presumption, render them ten-fold more disgusting both to God and man, than if they made no profession of religion at all. When such persons come into the presence of their God at the last day, what testimony will they receive from the heart-searching God but this, that “ they had a name to live, and were dead;” and that whilst “ they said that they were Jews, they lied, and were in reality of the synagogue of Satan?” Yes; “ their excellency may mount up to the heavens; but they shall perish like their own dung; and they that have seen them shall with surprise and grief exclaim, Where are they^e?”

^d Luke xvi. 15.

^e Job xx. 4—7.

The confidence which any of these classes may profess, only binds upon them the more strongly the fetters they have forged for themselves, and ensures more certainly their everlasting ruin^f.]

2. That many who are low in the estimation both of themselves and others, shall receive at last from God himself a glorious testimony in their behalf—

[Many there are of the Lord's "hidden ones," who have been kept back by diffidence or other circumstances from joining themselves to the Lord's people in an open and ostensible way, who yet shall receive from God the strongest tokens of his approbation. They perhaps envied the gifts and talents of some more forward professors, and thought themselves unworthy to join in their society: but God, who knew their hearts, said of them, "I know thy poverty; but thou art rich." He heard the sighs and groans which they uttered from day to day under a sense of their own unworthiness. He treasured up in his vial the tears they shed from a loathing of themselves, and an admiration of their God. He saw how precious the Lord Jesus Christ was to their souls, as their hope, their peace, their strength, their all. They were of no account perhaps amongst their fellow-Christians; but they were greatly beloved of their God. The more abased they were in their own eyes, the more exalted they were in his. He saw that in their prayers, their fastings, their alms, they sought not glory from men; and therefore "he in the last day will reward them openly." He will say of them in that day, "I saw thee under the fig-tree:" "if thy talent was small, thou madest a good improvement of it:" thou thoughtest that in "giving thy mite to the sanctuary," thou hadst done nothing; but I testify for thee, that "it was more in my sight than all that the rich gave out of their abundance." Yes, Beloved, as ye desire to serve and honour God, so will God accept and bless you: "He will bring to light the counsels of the heart; and then shall every man, who was of no account in his own eyes, have praise of God." If then, Brethren, ye be overlooked, or even calumniated and traduced by men, lay it not to heart, but seek to approve yourselves to the heart-searching God. Let man have *his* day, knowing assuredly that God will have his also^g, and that "his judgment will be according to truth."]

APPLICATION—

[Let all now shew what regard they have for God. Let all retire, with a consciousness that God sees them: let them go to their secret chamber, and there implore mercy from him for their past neglect of his presence, and grace that they may henceforth be enabled to "set him always before them," and to "walk in his fear all the day long."]

^f Prov. xxi. 2. and Ps. l. 21. ^g 1 Cor. iv. 3, 4. See the Greek.

DCCXXXV.

A CHRISTIAN'S DELIGHT IN GOD.

Ps. cxxxix. 17, 18. *How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee.*

THESE words will admit of a twofold interpretation: they may be considered as referring to the thoughts which God had entertained in his bosom respecting David, or to those which David entertained respecting God. If we take them in the former sense, the import of them is to this effect: 'It is impossible for me ever to enumerate the mercies which, in thine eternal counsels, thou hast prepared for me, and which I am daily receiving at thy hands: and if I should attempt to number them through the whole day, I should make so little progress, that in the following morning I should have all my work to do again.' In this view, they agree with what the inspired penman says in another psalm, "Many, O Lord my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered^a." If we take them in the latter sense, their meaning is, 'My delight in contemplating all thy glorious perfections, and all the wonders of thy love, O my God, is inexpressible: it is my sweet employment day and night, insomuch that my first waking thoughts ever recur to thee.' In this sense they accord with what he says in the 104th Psalm: "I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live: I will sing praise unto my God while I have my being. My meditation of him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the Lord^b." It is to this latter sense that I rather incline; because there is a remarkable coincidence between the general subject of the 104th Psalm with that which is before us, (both of them speaking altogether of God as the Creator and Governor of the world;)

^a Ps. xl. 5.^b Ps. civ. 33, 34.

and because the expressions of delight in God, in both the psalms, stand in immediate connexion with his aversion to sinners, whom, for their opposition to God, he consigns over to merited disgrace and punishment^c. But, in either case, this is clear, namely, that David found his happiness in contemplating the Deity: and whether we extend his views to the wonders of God's love in general, or confine them to those which had been vouchsafed personally to himself, they will equally afford me occasion to shew you the nature and blessedness of Christian experience.

Let us consider,

I. The nature of Christian experience—

The world at large have no conception of delighting themselves in God: they rather say to God in their hearts, “Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of thy ways^d.” And they endeavour to put him far from them: for they will not entertain him in all, or any of their thoughts^e. Nor has the hypocritical professor of religion any real delight in God: for Job says of him, “Will he delight himself in the Almighty? will he always call upon God^f?” But of the true Christian this is a very leading feature^g: he delights,

1. In the contemplation of God—

[His mind soars upwards to the Deity; who is, as it were, ever present to his view. In all the works of creation, in all the dispensations of Providence, and in all the wonders of redemption, he sees the glory and excellency of his God. He can behold nothing, he can think of nothing, which does not set God before him in some of his glorious perfections. The wisdom, the power, the goodness, the patience, the forbearance, the love, the mercy of his God, pass in review before his eyes, and call forth his devoutest acknowledgments; and the display of these, in his own personal experience, calls forth in him such admiring thoughts as no language can adequately express.

But it will be remembered, that this psalm speaks particularly of the omnipresence and omniscience of the Deity; and these perfections, which are so terrible to the ungodly, and of which they would, if possible, divest him, are to the true Christian

^c Compare Ps. civ. 34, 35. with Ps. cxxxix. 18, 19.

^d Job xxi. 14.

^e Ps. x. 4

^f Job xxvii. 8, 10.

^g Ps. xxxvii. 4. Isai. lviii. 14.

a source of exquisite delight. Wherever he goes, he sees God at his right hand, ready to direct him in all his ways, ready to succour him in all his exertions, ready to preserve him in every danger. In many instances, his views are misapprehended, his actions misinterpreted, his character traduced. But he comforts himself in the thought that God knoweth his heart, and is acquainted with every motion there; and that, whether he interpose or not to vindicate his character in this world, he will do it in the world to come; and that, if man have *his* day, God also will have his^b. True, he is conscious that God sees his infirmities; but he knows that God can distinguish what man cannot so easily discern, the difference between unallowed infirmities and wilful sins; and that if he behold our weaknesses, he is also acquainted with our sighs, our tears, our groans, every one of which attests the *desire* of our hearts, even where there has been too evident a failure in our *attainments*.]

2. In communion with him—

[These perfections of God, which are the subjects of the Christian's contemplation, are also the subjects of his devoutest praise. "Truly, his fellowship is with the Father, and with the Son, Jesus Christ."

Throughout the day "he walks with God," as Enoch did, communing with him, and committing to him his every concern. He would not willingly take a step but in entire dependence upon God. Not in his stated devotions only does he call upon God, but in ten thousand ejaculations through the day, according as circumstances arise to call them forth. In the whole habit of his mind "he dwells in God;" as "God also, by the constant communications of his grace, dwells in him." This mutual in-dwelling of God in his people, and his people in him, is frequently spoken of in the Holy Scripturesⁱ; and it well conveys the idea of that *rest in God* which every true Believer enjoys, and of that familiar intercourse, if I may so express myself, which subsists between his God and him.

But the expression in my text deserves a more particular consideration: "When I awake, I am still with thee." This implies all that we have before spoken; namely, that in his meditations and prayers he was with God *through the day*: and it goes further to remark, that such was the entire rest of his soul in God, that, with the early dawn, as soon as he awoke, *his very first thoughts rose to God*, who was the one object of all his desires, and the one source of all his happiness. Now this is, perhaps, as striking a feature in the Christian's experience as any that can be named. During the day, a Christian may have much to occupy his mind, and much to engage a great

^b See 1 Cor. iv. 3, 4. The Greek.

ⁱ John vi. 56. and 1 John iv. 15, 16.

intensity of thought: at such seasons, therefore, the contemplation of the Deity, and of communion with him, may be *in appearance* suspended: but, as the needle of a compass, which, by force, or superior attraction, has been diverted for a while from its proper rest, as soon as it is at liberty to resume its wonted position shews to all its faithful subjection to the polar influence; so does the soul of a Christian, as soon as it is relieved from the pressure of contingent circumstances, return to God, as its proper, its chosen, and its only rest. And I wish you all, my Brethren, to be observant of yourselves in this particular; and never to think that you have attained the full measure of communion with God, till you can say, "When I awake, I am still with thee.]"

Having described the nature of Christian experience, I shall need but few words to shew,

II. The blessedness of it—

The Psalmist strongly marks this: "How precious are thy thoughts unto me, O God!" Whether we understand him as speaking of God's thoughts of him, or of his thoughts of God, it is evident that the preciousness of them was felt in his own soul. Now this experience is truly blessed, because it fills the Christian's soul,

1. With a sense of its obligations—

[What do the ungodly world lose, whilst they overlook the hand from whence their blessings flow! Verily, in their richest enjoyments, they have little perception of them, wherein they are not equalled by the beasts themselves. It is the taste of God's love in them which gives to every one of them its highest zest. I hesitate not to say, that Lazarus, in the midst of his utter destitution, had, in the crumbs with which he was sustained, a sublimer gratification, than the Rich Man ever knew in all the pomp and delicacies with which he was surrounded. In truth, the discovery of God in every thing gives to the Christian a continual feast, and furnishes him with incessant occasions of unfeigned joy — — — Inanimate things proclaim unwittingly the honour of their God; but the believer sounds it forth continually with the devoutest acclamations. "All thy works praise thee," says the Psalmist; "but thy saints bless thee.]"

2. With a persuasion of its security—

[Those who know not God are at a loss where to flee, or what to do, in any great emergency. But the Christian is assured, that "God is at his right hand, and that therefore he can never be moved." He sees "God as a wall of fire round

about him:" not a wall only, that might possibly be scaled, but "a wall of fire," that will devour any who shall dare to assail us. "His very name is," to the Christian, "a strong tower," to which he runneth, and is safe. He sees "chariots of fire and horses of fire all around him;" and in perfect confidence he says, "If God be for me, who can be against me?"

Say, whether such an one be not happy? Hear his triumphant strains, and judge:—"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (as it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter :) nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord^k." If such an one be not happy, where shall happiness be found on earth?]

With an anticipation and foretaste of its eternal bliss—

[Such views of God, and such communion with him, what are they, but the very beginnings of heaven upon earth? The believer who can say "It is thus that I am with my God in this world," may add, with an emphasis peculiar to himself, "When I awake in the eternal world, I shall be still with thee;" changing my place indeed, but neither my company nor my employment — — —]

ADDRESS—

[Beloved Brethren, has God from all eternity occupied his thoughts about you, and will not you turn your thoughts to him? Delay not. I will not say, Rob not him of his glory: I will rather say, Rob not yourselves of happiness. You cannot doubt the felicity of those who thus contemplate and enjoy their God. O let not the vanities of time and sense stand in competition with him! Look at the worst that befalls a Christian, and you shall find him blessed in the midst of all. See him "poor in spirit;" see him "mourning and weeping;" see him "persecuted for righteousness' sake:" in every state he is pronounced "blessed," "blessed," "blessed." On the other hand, tell me where you will find the worldling blessed under any circumstances whatever. No: "in the fulness of his sufficiency he is in straits." Know for a certainty, that he alone is, or ever shall be, blessed, whom God, the Judge of quick and dead, shall pronounce so. He alone is truly blessed, who has God for his God, his portion, "his eternal great reward."]

^k Rom. viii. 35—39.

DCCXXXVI.

THE DIFFICULTY OF KNOWING OUR OWN STATE.

Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24. *Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*

THE perfections of God are all infinitely glorious; but, like the cloud of fire, they have a different aspect towards the friends, and the enemies of God. To the ungodly they are dark and terrible; but to the godly they are full of light and comfort^a. His omniscience in particular is a ground both of joy and terror: in this light David speaks of it in the psalm before us. He represents this attribute in striking colours^b; he declares that the consideration of it was delightful to him^c: but the prospect it afforded him with respect to the wicked was extremely melancholy^d. Returning however to his own immediate concerns, he improves this attribute to his own spiritual advantage^e.

From these words we may notice,

I. The danger of indulging any secret sin—

There is no man who is perfectly free from sin^f; but no real Christian will knowingly harbour sin. The indulging of it could not consist with his salvation. This is strongly intimated in the text^g. It is also expressly declared in other parts of Scripture.

[A regenerate person it is said cannot indulge sin^h. Allowed sin characterizes those who are of the devilⁱ: it entirely prevents the acceptance of our prayers^k: it entails on a person everlasting destruction^l. Our Lord repeatedly urges this as a reason for mortifying every sin, how pleasant or profitable soever it be^m.]

Nor ought it to be esteemed “an hard saying”—

[The harbouring of any sin is a contempt of God’s

^a Exod. xv. 11.

^b ver. 1—12.

^c ver. 17, 18.

^d ver. 19.

^e ver. 23, 24.

^f 1 Kings viii. 46.

^g He intimates that if there were *any* wicked way in him, he could not be walking in the way everlasting.

^h 1 John iii. 9.

ⁱ 1 John iii. 8.

^k Ps. lxvi. 18.

^l Matt. v. 19.

^m Matt. v. 29, 30.

authorityⁿ: it defeats the end of Christ's incarnation and death^o: it argues an entire want of sincerity^p: it therefore justly brings the curse of God upon us^q.]

There is one thing indeed which renders the consideration of this extremely awful; namely,

II. The difficulty of discerning whether we have any allowed sin in us or not—

The rule of our duty is clear enough; but it is by no means easy to determine how far our experience corresponds with it. This is evidently implied in the solicitude which David expresses for divine aid and direction. It may be confirmed also by many scripture examples—

[What ignorance of his own heart did Hazael discover^r! James and John little thought by what spirit they were actuated^s, nor was Peter aware of his own instability^t. Paul himself could not venture positively to determine the extent of his own innocence^u. God has declared that no one can attain a perfect knowledge of his own heart^x.]

Many reasons might be assigned for this difficulty—

[The very best of our actions are blended with sin. Self-love tempts us to view them in too favourable a light: we put specious names on our bosom-sins. Hence it is hard to discern the exact quality of our actions.]

To evince however that there is one way of judging aright, we shall proceed to shew,

III. The means we should use for the ascertaining of it—

Self-examination is a duty inculcated in Scripture^y. It is necessary for the attaining of self-knowledge. The Christian therefore can adopt the words of Asaph^z.—But he does not rest satisfied with his own exertions—

[He is aware of “the deceitfulness of sin,” the treachery of his own heart, and “the devices of Satan.” Though he rejoices in the testimony of his own conscience, he dares not confide in it too much^a.]

ⁿ Jam. ii. 10, 11.

^o 1 John iii. 8.

^p John i. 47.

^q Jer. xlviii. 10.

^r 2 Kings viii. 13.

^s Luke ix. 55.

^t Matt. xxvi. 35.

^u 1 Cor. iv. 4.

^x Jer. xvii. 9.

^y 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

^z Ps. lxxvii. 6.

^a Prov. xxviii. 26.

He cries to God to “search and try him”—

[He remembers whose prerogative it is to search the heart^b: he reads the word that God may search him with it^c: he regards conscience as God’s vicegerent^d: he looks up for the Spirit’s aid and influence^e. In this way he prays, like David, *frequently, and with fervour*^f.]

He commits himself to the divine guidance and direction—

[He knows he shall err if God do not “lead” him: he trusts in the promises which God has given him in his word^g.]

In this way he attains abiding peace and confidence^h.

APPLICATION—

[Let us all begin the work of self-examination. Let us call in the divine aid with importunate supplications. Let us inquire whether there be not some sin which we indulge, or some duty which we neglect? Let us especially take notice of our “*thoughts*” — — — Let us not think that inadvertence can excuse our sins, while we neglect the means of discovering themⁱ: Let us tremble lest, through the indulgence of one sin, our religion prove vain at last^k; let us not walk in a way which shall serve merely for a *present show*, but a way that shall be of “everlasting” benefit.]

^b Jer. xvii. 10.

^c Heb. iv. 12.

^d Prov. xx. 27.

^e Rom. viii. 26.

^f Mark the text.

^g Ps. xxv. 9. Prov. iii. 6.

^h Phil. iv. 6, 7.

ⁱ Lev. v. 17.

^k Jam. i. 26.

DCCXXXVII.

LIBERTY DESIRED.

Ps. cxlii. 7. *Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name!*

GREAT are the changes which, from time to time, we observe in the material world; namely, from darkness to light, from barrenness to fertility, from death to life. Such likewise take place in the spiritual world; for men, by the Gospel, are “turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.” Nor is this spiritual change less visible than the other. There are signs whereby we may “know that we have passed from death unto life,” and been “translated from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God’s dear Son.” When David penned the psalm before us, he was hid in a cave, and was every

moment in danger of being discovered and destroyed by his potent enemy, King Saul. But there was also a spiritual bondage to which he was reduced by means of the persecutions he endured; and hence he offers the petition in my text, "Bring my soul out of prison!" And for what end did he desire this deliverance? Was it merely on account of the relief which it would afford to him? No: he had higher and nobler feelings; and was actuated by a concern for God's honour far more than by any personal consideration whatever.

That I may mark this peculiarity in David's experience, I will shew,

I. Under what circumstances we may well offer this petition—

It is not needful that we should be immured in a dungeon, or shut up in a cave, from whence there seems to be no way of escape. We may offer this petition,

1. Under the pressure of unpardoned guilt—

[Truly, a soul under the dread of God's everlasting wrath is in a state of sore bondage. All in an unforgiven state are said to be "concluded," or *shut up*, "under sin^a:" and, in fact, there are no bonds so painful as those which sin has forged for a guilty conscience. Hear David, under a sense of guilt: "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old, through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer^b." Indeed, whoever has felt the burthen of sin, and how impossible it is for any but God to take it off, will pant for "the glorious liberty of the children of God," and rejoice from his inmost soul in that promise, that "the Son, even the Lord Jesus Christ, will make us free^c."]

2. Under those various trials to which, as Christians, we are exposed—

[All are more or less under *persecution from man*. And what bondage that brings, the psalm before us will abundantly declare. In truth, the embarrassment occasioned to children by their ungodly parents, to servants by their oppressive masters, and to subjects by persecuting magistrates, exceeds all that can be conceived: for, who can draw the precise line between our duty to God and to man, when their conflicting orders seem to render a resistance to the one or to the other of

^a Rom. xi. 32.

^b Ps. xxxii. 3, 4. See also Ps. xl. 11, 12.

^c John viii. 32, 36.

these governors unavoidable? And to what sad alternatives have the children of God been often brought, through the enactment of unrighteous laws!

Under *temptation from Satan*, too, are multitudes reduced to sad extremities! Behold the Apostle Paul, when under the buffetings of Satan; with what repeated cries he pleads with God for deliverance^d! Even our blessed Lord himself was so harassed by this wicked adversary, that he scarcely knew what to say, or what to do: "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name^e." And who can tell what thousands have suffered through the devices of this great adversary, and from the fiery darts with which he has pierced their souls^f?

Nor must I omit to mention the yet sorer bondage which is sometimes experienced through *desertion from God*. For wise and gracious reasons, God is sometimes pleased to hide his face from his people, and for a season to appear to them as an enemy and an avenger. Hear the complaint of Heman, in the 88th Psalm: "My soul is full of troubles; and my life draweth nigh unto the grave. Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. Thy wrath lieth hard upon me; and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves. Lord, why castest thou off my soul? why hidest thou thy face from me? I am afflicted, and ready to die from my youth up: while I suffer thy terrors, I am distracted. Thy fierce wrath goeth over me; Thy terrors have cut me off^g." But hear our blessed Lord himself, from whom all that man could inflict drew no complaint; yet, in the hour of dereliction from his heavenly Father, he poured forth this bitter cry: "My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me^h?" And so it is with many a pious soul, when "the arrows of the Almighty are within them, the poison whereof drinketh up their spirit; and when the terrors of God do set themselves in array against themⁱ."

In all these instances, then, the afflicted soul may well pour forth the petition in my text: "Bring my soul out of prison!"]

Yet let me shew you,

II. What, in offering it, should be the chief object of our desire—

I am far from saying that deliverance is not to be desired *for its own sake*: for God himself condescends to acknowledge, that, whatever be the ultimate design of his chastisements, "affliction is not at the present

^d 2 Cor. xii. 7, 8. ^e John xii. 27, 28. ^f Eph. vi. 11, 16.
^g Ps. lxxxviii. 3, 6, 7, 14—16. ^h Matt. xxvii. 46. ⁱ Job vi. 4.

joyous, but grievous^k:" and to require man to be so divested of all personal feeling as not to desire ease and freedom for their own sake, is, in my apprehension, an unscriptural refinement. But, beyond a doubt, we should, in all our desires, have a higher object in view, even as our Lord had when praying for the removal of the bitter cup, yea, and "praying for it with strong crying and tears^l;" he was content to drink it, that God's will might be done, and his name be glorified^m. Thus David in my text prays, "Bring my soul out of prison, *that I may praise thy name!*" *This* was uppermost in his mind, even when his life was in the utmost jeopardy: and *this* must always be the most influential principle in our minds.

1. The frame of mind itself is most desirable—

[A man possessing a spirit of gratitude and praise cannot but be happy. Under the greatest sufferings, it will alleviate our pain, and enable us to "rejoice under the heaviest tribulations." We see Paul and Silas, when immured in a prison, with their feet fastened in the stocks, and their backs torn with scourges, singing praises to God at midnight: and who, I ask, were the happier, they, or their ungodly persecutors? We wonder not, then, that David, under all his troubles, laid the chief stress on this, as the ground on which he sought deliverance: "Have mercy upon me, O Lord! consider the trouble which I suffer of them that hate me, thou that liftest me up from the gates of death; *that I may shew forth all thy praise* in the gates of the daughter of Zion: I will rejoice in thy salvationⁿ."]]

2. It is that frame by which we most glorify our God—

[This frame of mind shews the power and efficacy of divine grace. A man whose soul is thus made free, whatever be the bondage in which his body is held, is "*free indeed*." This is the state of mind which is pre-eminently characteristic of the true Christian, who "neither lives to himself, nor dies to himself; but living, lives unto the Lord; and dying, dies unto the Lord; that, whether living or dying, he may be the Lord's^o." In a word, then only do we honour our profession aright, when our one great concern is, "that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ^p."]]

3. It is that frame by which we are best prepared for heaven—

^k Heb. xii. 11.

^l Heb. v. 7.

^m Matt. xxvi. 38—41.

ⁿ Ps. ix. 13, 14.

^o Rom. xiv. 7, 8.

^p 1 Pet. iv. 11.

[Heaven is a state of incessant praise. The heavenly hosts “rest not day nor night from pouring forth their acclamations and hosannahs to God and to the Lamb.” And here, we are tuning our harps, and beginning to learn their song. Now, the very end for which God sends us affliction is, to purge away our dross, and to prepare us for heaven; and therefore we then best answer his design in afflicting us, when we take occasion from our troubles to abound more and more in thanksgiving to our God.

In every view, then, the desire expressed by David, in our text, was that which we ought most to cherish, as most worthy of our holy profession; as being most excellent in itself, most honourable to God, and most conducive to our eternal happiness.]

APPLICATION—

1. Be thankful that you are where you may offer this petition, with a certainty that it shall be answered—

[We read of “spirits in prison,” to whom deliverance can never come^a. But you, Beloved, are “*prisoners of hope*,” to whom mercy may be accorded, not only “double” the amount of all your desert of punishment, but “double” the amount of all your most sanguine expectations^t. Your blessed Saviour came on purpose to deliver you^s; and if only you cry to him, “he will save your souls with a great deliverance.”]

2. If you have experienced deliverance, be sure you improve it for the honour of your God—

[When our Lord healed the cripple, he said to him, “Behold, thou art made whole! sin no more.” So, if you are brought forth from bondage of any kind, take care not to “use your liberty as a cloak of licentiousness, but as the servants of God^t,” that ye may run with more enlargement the way of his commandments.]

^a 1 Pet. iii. 19.

^t Zech. ix. 12.

^s Isai. xlii. 7. and lxi. 1—3.

^t 1 Pet. ii. 16.

DCCXXXVIII.

A STRICT AWARD OF JUSTICE DEPRECATED.

Ps. cxliii. 2. *Enter not into judgment with thy servant; for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.*

TRIALS and persecutions are sometimes permitted by God, for the purpose of honouring his people, and advancing his work in their souls; and may justly be regarded by them as a *gift* from God, bestowed on

them *for Christ's sake* for their eternal good^a. But under some circumstances, trials may be viewed rather as judgments from God on account of some iniquity which they have committed. In this light must we consider all the troubles which arose to David in his own family, after his transgression in the matter of Uriah. The evil was unmerited as far as related to the persons who inflicted it; but it was received from God as a chastisement, under which it became him to humble himself in dust and ashes. We are not indeed certain at what time David wrote this psalm, whether when he was suffering under Saul, or when his own son Absalom had driven him from his throne. We are rather inclined to think it was at the latter period, because that affliction was so decidedly a punishment for his former sins, having been predicted by Nathan in that view. But, whatever were the circumstances under which the psalm was written, David viewed them as judgments from God which he deprecated; whilst, as to the immediate occasion, he appealed to God that he did not merit such treatment at the hands of man. In his appeal to God, he had called upon him "in faithfulness and in righteousness to hear and answer him;" but it was only in reference to the evils imputed to him by man that he dared thus to speak: before God he knew he deserved all that could be inflicted on him; and therefore he implored mercy at his hands, as one self-convicted and self-condemned: "Enter not, &c."

These words we shall consider in a two-fold point of view;

I. As containing principles for our instruction—

It is obvious that in this address of David to Jehovah the following truths are declared;

1. That all men are sinners before God—

[David speaks of "every living man." And this is the universal testimony of Scripture, that "there is none righteous, no, not one:" that "in many things we all offend;" that "every mouth must be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God." The man who denies this, is said to be

^a Phil. i. 29.

“a self-deceiver,” and to “make God himself a liar^b.” Job, though not possessing the Mosaic writings, had a deep insight into this truth. He saw that it was the necessary consequence of the fall of Adam; for that our first parents being unclean, nothing but what was unclean could proceed from them^c. Indeed it was by no ordinary method that Job was brought to the knowledge of this truth. A vision was vouchsafed to him for this express purpose, and such a vision as made “his very hairs to stand upright,” and “every bone of his body to shake^d.” And verily a discovery of the corruption of our hearts would produce the same effect on us, yea, and would drive us utterly to despair, if some view of the mercy of God in Christ Jesus were not vouchsafed to us at the same time. This then is the first principle avowed in the passage before us, “That there is no man that liveth and doth good, and sinneth not^e.”]

2. That all, as sinners, are obnoxious to God’s heavy displeasure—

[To man in Paradise it was said, “In the day that thou eatest of the forbidden tree thou shalt surely die.” From that time to this “the wages of sin have been death.” The whole Gospel assumes this as an acknowledged truth: for, if all were not under the displeasure of God, all did not need a Saviour, nor was Christ a propitiation for their sins. But if all are sinners, then are all under a sentence of death: since it is written, “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them;” and again, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.” Paul, when ignorant of God’s law, thought himself alive: but, when instructed in it, perceived himself to be dead, even as others^f.]

3. That all must look for some other way of justification than by any works of their own—

[Justification necessarily implies, that a person is not considered as guilty in the sight of God. But all being guilty, they are condemned as sinners; and consequently cannot at the same time be justified as righteous. But there is a righteousness provided for sinners, in, and through, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is on that very account called, “The Lord our righteousness.” In him the vilest of the human race “may be justified, and may glory^g.” But in any other way not even the Apostles themselves could be justified^h — — — Every man therefore that would find acceptance with God in the last day, must seek “to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, but the righteousness which is of God by faith in Christⁱ.”]

^b 1 John i. 8, 10.

^c Job xv. 14—16. and xxv. 4—6.

^d Job iv. 12—19.

^e Eccl. vii. 20:

^f Rom. vii. 9.

^g Isai. xlv. 25.

^h Gal. ii. 16.

ⁱ Phil. iii. 9.

But whilst we view the text as establishing the fundamental principles of the Gospel, let us view it also, II. As exhibiting a pattern for our imitation—

Who amongst us does not need to deprecate the severity of God's justice, precisely as David does? Let us examine,

1. The general tenour of our past lives—

[From our youth up, what have we been, and what have we done? Has it been the one object of our lives to answer the great end of our creation? — — — Have we duly estimated and sought the blessings of redemption? — — — Have we under the influences of the Holy Spirit laboured continually to fulfil the will of God, and attain his image, and possess his glory? — — — Have we not rather been so occupied with the things of time and sense, as to live almost, if not altogether, “without God in the world?” — — —]

2. Our conduct during the last year—

[We have received innumerable blessings at God's hands; and how have we requited him? — — — We have committed innumerable sins; how have we humbled ourselves for them? — — — We have enjoyed many opportunities for spiritual advancement; how have we improved them? — — — Perhaps we have formed some purposes of amendment: have we carried them into effect to the extent we intended? Has the loss of the years that preceded it made us diligent to improve, as it were, every hour of this? and are we as much fitter for the eternal world as we are nearer to it? — — —]

3. The very best work we ever performed—

[Weigh it in the balance, and see if it be not found wanting. Examine *the principle* from which it flowed: was it as purely and entirely from the love of God, and from a sense of gratitude to the Redeemer, as it ought to have been? Look at *the manner* in which it was performed: was there all that humility, that zeal, that dependence on God for his grace and strength, which became you? — — — Mark also *the end* for which it was done: was there a simple desire to serve, and please, and glorify God, without any mixture of self-pleasing, self-seeking, self-glorifying? Alas! alas! if only we would try ourselves by the perfect standard of God's law, we should see, that we need One to “bear the iniquity of our holiest things;” and, for the best as well as for the worst of our actions, to cry out, Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord; for in thy sight shall no man living be justified! If David and Job could not answer for the best of their actions, how much less can we^k?]

^k Job ix. 2, 3. Ps. cxxx. 3, 4.

ADDRESS—

1. The self-righteous and self-sufficient—

[How unlike are you to David, or indeed to any other of the saints of God! Look at Job^l, Isaiah^m, Paulⁿ; Are you better than they? Seek then to possess more of their spirit: for it is “he who humbleth himself, and he only, that shall ever be exalted” — — —]

2. The broken-hearted and contrite—

[Be not discouraged because you see your vileness; but rather be thankful to God, who has made you sensible of your desert. And do not imagine, that, because you cannot be justified by any thing of your own, you cannot be justified at all: for Christ came into the world for such as you; “He came to seek and to save that which was lost:” and the vilest person in the universe, if with a penitent and contrite heart he believe in Christ, is authorized confidently to say, “In the Lord have I righteousness and strength^o” — — —]

^l Job ix. 20, 21, 30, 31, 32. and xlii. 6.^m Isai. vi. 5.ⁿ Rom. vii. 18.^o Isai. xlv. 22, 24.

DCCXXXIX.

GOD A REFUGE TO THE DISTRESSED.

Ps. cxliii. 7—10. *Hear me speedily, O Lord! my spirit faileth: hide not thy face from me, lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit. Cause me to hear thy loving-kindness in the morning; for in thee do I trust: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee. Deliver me, O Lord, from mine enemies: I flee unto thee to hide me. Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God: thy spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness.*

THIS is the last of what are called the Penitential Psalms; and it is appointed by the Church to be read at the beginning of Lent, as being peculiarly suited to that season which is more particularly consecrated to humiliation before God. It is supposed, by many, that it was written at the time of Absalom's rebellion: but I conceive that it must rather have been penned during the persecutions which he suffered at the hands of Saul: because his trouble had evidently been of long continuance^a; whereas that which arose from Absalom's rebellion was soon terminated. However

^a ver. 3.

this may be, it is plain that he was brought into great distress, and that he sought help, where alone it could be found, in the Lord his God.

That I may bring the substance of the psalm distinctly before you, I will take occasion to shew,

I. To what a state a good man may, by accumulated troubles, be reduced—

Of David's piety, except in the matter of Uriah, we have no doubt.

But he was exposed to many and sore trials—

[Even from his youth he was in continual danger, from the persecutions of Saul: and how heavily they bore upon his mind, the psalms which he composed most amply testify. "Save me, O God! for the waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me. I am weary of my crying; my throat is dried: mine eyes fail, while I wait for my God." Would we know what was the occasion of this overwhelming sorrow? He tells us; "They that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head: they that would destroy me, being mine enemies wrongfully, are mighty^b."] "

Much also was that holy man exercised with spiritual affliction. His feelings were quite in accordance with those of Heman in the 88th Psalm: "O Lord God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before thee: let my prayer come before thee: incline thine ear unto my cry; for my soul is full of troubles; and my life draweth nigh unto the grave. I am counted with them that go down into the pit: I am as a man that hath no strength: free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, whom thou rememberest no more: and they are cut off from thy hand. Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves Lord, why castest thou off my soul? why hidest thou thy face from me? I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up: while I suffer thy terrors, I am distracted. Thy fierce wrath goeth over me; thy terrors have cut me off^c."

In the psalm before us, the affliction which pressed the more heavily on his mind seems to have been of a temporal kind: but it was very heavy, insomuch that "his spirit was overwhelmed within him, and his heart within him was desolate^d." This accounts for a degree of impatience which he manifested; which yet was the impatience of importunity only, and not of murmuring; and, consequently, was well pleasing to the Lord:

^b Ps. lxxix. 1—4. ^c Ps. lxxxviii. 1—7, 14—16. ^d ver. 4.

“Hear me *speedily*, O Lord! my spirit faileth.” But from whatever source it flowed, it shews that]

Good men amongst ourselves may be reduced to like extremities—

[No man is exempt from trouble, whether of a temporal or spiritual kind. Heavy trials, from whatever quarter they come, will still overwhelm the mind, especially if they be of long continuance. And Satan will take advantage of a season of dejection, to instil into the mind hard thoughts of God, and to sink it into utter despair. The experience of holy Job clearly shews us how powerful the devices of Satan are, and how terrible his assaults. “The arrows of the Almighty are within me,” says he; “the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit: the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me.” Let not any, then, take offence at religion, if they still find that persons of real piety be occasionally harassed with temptation, or oppressed with a dread of God’s avenging wrath. They may not immediately see wherefore God contendeth with them: but they shall be made victorious in the end, yea, and “more than conquerors, through Him that loveth them.”]

In confirmation of this, I proceed to shew,

II. What a blessed refuge yet remains open to him—

To whom did David betake himself in this extremity?

[In the preceding psalm this point is answered: “I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: *refuge failed me*; no man cared for my soul. I cried unto thee, O LORD: I said, THOU ART MY REFUGE^f.” Accordingly, in the psalm before us, we find him crying unto the Lord, and saying, “I stretch forth my hands unto THEE: my soul thirsteth after THEE, as a thirsty land.” But let us mark how strongly he reiterates this in the words of my text: “Hear me *speedily*, O Lord! for in THEE do I trust: I lift up my soul unto THEE: I flee unto THEE to hide me: for THOU art MY GOD.” He knew how utterly unable he was to deliver himself; whilst of God’s condescension and grace he had ample experience: and therefore, whilst destitute of all other hope, “he encouraged himself in the Lord his God.”]

And is there not the same blessed refuge for us at this day?

[Yes; “God is a refuge for us^e,” and it is the privilege of every true Believer to say, “In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God^h.”]

^e Job vi. 4. ^f Ps. cxlii. 4, 5. ^g Ps. lxii. 8. ^h Ps. lxii. 7.

Of whatever kind our trials be, the direction given us is this: "Cast thy burthen on the Lord, and he will sustain thee^l." Are we assaulted by persecutors? David's example will shew us where to go, and how to obtain relief: "Plead my cause, O Lord, with them that strive with me: fight thou against them that fight against me. Take hold of shield and buckler, and stand up for mine help. Draw out also the spear, and stop the way against them that persecute me: say unto my soul, I am thy salvation^k." Is our trouble rather of a spiritual kind? The Prophet Isaiah clearly directs our way: "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God^l." To all, then, in the name of God himself, I would say, "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, (the perfections and the promises of thy God;) and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself, as it were, for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast^m."]

Not to rest in this general view, I will go on to shew,

III. What he may hope to obtain by fervent and persevering prayer—

See what the petitions of David were: "Hear me speedily, O Lord! my spirit faileth: hide not thy face from me, lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit. Cause me to hear thy loving-kindness in the morning: cause me to know the way wherein I should go: deliver me from mine enemies: teach me to do thy will; and lead me into the land of uprightness." Now, what in these petitions he sought, we also may hope by similar importunity to obtain:

1. The manifestations of God's favour—

[An upright soul cannot but earnestly desire these: for "in His favour is life, and His loving-kindness is better than life itselfⁿ." In comparison of this, there is nothing good, nothing desirable, in the whole universe: "Who will shew us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us^o!" If a sense of God's favour be withdrawn, and his face be hid from an upright soul, it is as the precincts of hell itself^p. Seek then, in the first place, to be reconciled to God through the Son of his love: and cease not to importune him, till the morning arise upon you, and a sense of his loving-kindness be shed abroad in your hearts.]

ⁱ Ps. lv. 22.

^k Ps. xxxv. 1—3.

^l Isai. l. 10.

^m Isai. xxvi. 20.

ⁿ Ps. lxiii. 3.

^o Ps. iv. 6.

^p Ps. lxxx. 3—5.

2. The interpositions of his providence—

[In arduous circumstances, our way is made exceeding difficult; so that oftentimes we know not what to do: we seem indeed to be shut up in the very hands of our enemies, and to have no way of escape open to us. But it is never in vain to call upon God, who in the very hour of extremity will appear for us, and will rescue us, like Peter, from our prison, when, to all human appearance, there is no longer any hope of escape^a. Still is that proverb realized, “In the mount, the mount of difficulty, shall the Lord be seen^t.” Only cry out, like Jonah, “from the very belly of hell;” and from thence shalt thou be delivered^s; and thine enemies, who sought thy life, shall all be turned back^t. The whole people of Israel, at the Red Sea, appeared to be already, as it were, swallowed up by their powerful and blood-thirsty enemies: but a way was opened through the mighty waters, which became a path to Israel, and a grave to Egypt. And to us also will God still be known, as the God who “maketh the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over^u.”]

3. The influences of his grace—

[To the latest hour of our lives we shall need the sanctifying and saving operations of God’s Holy Spirit: and guide us he will in all our ways, till he bring us finally to the possession of his glory^x. His blessed Spirit is still as good and gracious and condescending as ever. He will teach us to *do* God’s will, as well as to *know* it; and will make all our tribulation a way to his kingdom^y, and our sufferings the means of fitting us for the enjoyment of it^z.]

Let us then LEARN, from this subject,

1. How to judge of our state before God—

[It is not by our *occasional feelings* that we are to judge, but by our *abiding taste*. You may be fainting, and, in your own apprehension, ready to perish; and yet be in a state of safety before God: for Heman, Asaph, David, and Job, were all under great distress of mind, and were brought, for a season, to the very brink of despair. But if you are longing for a sense of God’s favour as your supreme good, and are desirous to know, in order that you may do, his will, you have nothing to fear. You may be in darkness; but “light is sown for you;” and it shall spring up in due season. Your “weeping may endure for a night; but joy shall come in the morning^a.”]

^a Acts xii. 6—9.

^t Gen. xxii. 14.

^s Jonah ii. 2.

^t 2 Chron. xviii. 31.

^u Isai. li. 10.

^x Ps. lxxiii. 24.

^y Acts xiv. 22. and Rev. vii. 14.

^z 2 Cor. iv. 17. Rom. viii. 28.

^a Ps. xxx. 5.

2. How to act under overwhelming calamities—

[Go *not from* God, but *to* him: and the greater sense you have of your necessities, be only so much the more urgent in your application to him. That you may be overwhelmed for a season, the prophet acknowledges: “for even the youths may faint and be weary, and the young men may utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint^b.” Only “follow on to know the Lord;” and you shall as surely behold the light of his countenance, as the sun shall return after the darkest night^c. “The vision, it is true, may tarry: but at its appointed season it shall come,” and not disappoint the expectations of any creature in the universe who waiteth for it^d.]

^b Isai. xl. 29—31.^c Hos. vi. 3.^d Hab. ii. 3.

DCCXL.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE RIGHTEOUS.

Ps. cxliv. 15. *Happy is that people that is in such a case: yea, happy is that people whose God is the Lord.*

TO inquiries after happiness, one answer only can be given. Every thing in the whole creation is forced to confess, “It is not in me, It is not in me.” It can be found in God alone. The Psalmist’s choice was the only one that could be made consistently with true wisdom: “There be many that say, Who will shew us any good! Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us^a.” The same is the judgment which he gives us in the passage before us. We may, indeed, understand the text rather as expressive of the union between piety towards God, and the temporal blessings consequent upon it: for it is certain that, under that dispensation, God did confer temporal benefits on those who served him with fidelity: but, if understood as a corrective of the foregoing statement, it will more fully express the general sentiment of Scripture. The Psalmist, after describing a state of great national prosperity, says, “Blessed is that people that is in such a case:” and then, either in a way of confirmation, or of restriction, he adds, “Yea, blessed is that people whose God is the Lord.”

^a Ps. iv. 6.

Were we disposed to deny the blessedness attendant on earthly prosperity, we should feel a jealousy over ourselves, in taking the two clauses of our text in a contrasted view: but, as it is our intention to give full weight to the former affirmation, and as the latter, if taken in somewhat of a contrasted view, contains a truth not confined to that dispensation, but common to every age and place, I shall take occasion, from the text, to shew,

I. The comfort of earthly prosperity—

[Too sanguine may be our expectations from earthly things, no doubt: but, on the other hand, it is possible to speak of earthly things in terms more contemptuous than either the word of God, or the experience of his people will, justify. It is not uncommon for persons professing the Gospel, or even preaching it, to represent earthly things as altogether worthless. But who is there that finds them so? Who is there that does not experience pain from the want, and satisfaction from the supply, of them? Nor is this feeling at all unbecoming a real Christian: for Christians are men; and, consequently, susceptible of pain or pleasure from the want or the enjoyment of the things that are needful for the body. Let any one be honest, and he will confess that he is not so independent of earthly things as to feel no comfort from the possession of them, and no grief at the loss. As for those who affect voluntary poverty and privations, they are no more really mortified to the world than others: they prefer the gratification of their *spiritual* lusts to merely *corporeal* indulgences: and whatever they take out of the scale of earthly pleasure, they put, in full proportion, into the opposite scale of pride and self-complacency. They entertain a notion that the mortification of their bodies is meritorious, and that it will raise them in the estimation of God and man; and, under this impression, they pour contempt on earthly comforts. But they only exchange one lust for another that is equally hateful in the sight of God. Their superstition contradicts the testimony of God himself, who, both under the Old Testament and the New, promises earthly things under the notion of blessings. The whole Mosaic law was enforced with promises of temporal prosperity. Was not that an acknowledgment that temporal prosperity contributed to our comfort? Even under the New Testament dispensation, we are told that “godliness hath the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come^b:” and, that “God hath given us all things richly to enjoy^c:” which shews, that enjoyment is connected with the possession of them.

^b 1 Tim. iv. 8.

^c 1 Tim. vi. 18.

These observations, however, are confined to that mediocrity of condition to which Agur refers, when he says, "Give me neither poverty nor riches, but *food convenient for me*^d." For opulence does not of itself increase our comfort: it increases rather our temptations and our cares: for what has a man of extensive property, more than the mere enjoyment of "beholding it with his eyes?" In proportion "as his goods increase, they are increased that eat them^e." A man's own personal comfort is confined within very narrow bounds: "food and raiment" constitute the catalogue of his wants^f; and whatever is beyond this, brings with it more the appearance, than the reality, of comfort. The peaceful and regular enjoyment of a moderate competency, however, is doubtless a rich blessing: and, with David, we may justly say, "Happy are the people that are in such a case."

Yet, viewing the latter clause of our text as restricting the former, we must particularly observe, that earthly things are no blessings, except as they are subordinated to God: for the very instant they are put in the place of God, they may be *apparent* blessings; but *in reality* they are curses; as every thing must be which estranges our hearts from God. As *received from him*, and *employed for him*, they are good: but, when they usurp his throne, and become a god unto us, they are as contemptible as the very dirt under our feet.]

That we may see earthly prosperity in its true light, it will be proper to view it in contrast with spiritual blessings: for which end I will proceed to mark,

II. The superior comfort of true piety—

Piety consists in this, the "having the Lord for our God." The broad line of distinction between the righteous and the wicked is, that, whilst the wicked have their affections supremely placed on some object of time or sense, the righteous have their hearts entirely fixed on God, as reconciled to them in the Son of his love. Now these are far happier than any worldly man: for they have,

1. A more *suitable* portion—

[What can the world do for the *soul* of any man? He is oppressed with a sense of sin: What is there in the world that can remove the load from his mind? He wants the pardon of his sin, and peace with God: What can the world do to obtain these blessings for him? He desires strength to resist temptation: Whither upon earth can he go, with a hope of acquiring

^d Prov. xxx. 8.

^e Eccl. v. 11.

^f 1 Tim. vi. 8.

it? He would gladly have death disarmed of its sting: but nothing in this world can render him that invaluable service. In a word, he would secure a happy eternity: but, ah! what is there upon earth that can confer on him so great a benefit? But if “he have the Lord Jehovah for his God,” if he have sought *Him*, obtained *His* favour, and given up himself to *Him*, all is well: he has nothing to fear; nothing to desire. In having God for his portion, he has secured to him the very things which he pants after; he has pardon, and peace, and holiness, and glory.]

2. A more *satisfying* portion—

[Suppose a man to possess the whole world, there will still be in his bosom an aching void, a secret something unpossessed. But the man who can look up to the Lord Jesus Christ, and say, “This is my Friend, and my Beloved,” “My Beloved is mine, and I am his,” can never wish for any thing beyond. Our blessed Lord has said, “He that drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whoso drinketh of the water that I shall give, shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life^g.” Not only has *earth* nothing that can add to him, but not even heaven itself contains any thing that can augment his bliss. He can adopt the words of David and say, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is nothing upon earth that I desire besides thee^h.” I mean not to say that there is an *indifference* to earthly comforts produced upon his mind: but there is a *contentment*; insomuch that he is “fully instructed and prepared, either to be full or to be hungry, either to abound or to suffer needⁱ.”]

3. He has a more *lasting* portion—

[Whatever a man possess in this world, he must soon be stripped of it all, and “go as naked out of the world as he came into it.” But at death, the godly man comes into the full possession of his inheritance. All that he enjoyed in this life was only like the portion of a minor, who has just a sufficiency allotted to him for his education in the world; but, when he goes hence, he comes of age, and takes possession of all the wealth provided for him by the Father. Millions of ages will not lessen his portion, or diminish his enjoyment of it.

Say, then, Is not HE happy? Yes; we may say of him, as Moses does, “Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thine excellency^k!”]

^g John iv. 13, 14.

ⁱ Phil. iv. 11, 12.

^h Ps. lxxiii. 25.

^k Deut. xxxiii. 29.

This subject affords me a fit occasion to IMPRESS upon your minds,

1. The wisdom of industrious habits—

[Think not that this is a suggestion unworthy of a minister of the Gospel. St. Paul inculcates strongly and frequently this lesson: “Be not slothful in business¹.” “If any man will not work, neither shall he eat^m.” “Let him that stole, steal no more; but rather let him labour with his hands the thing that is good, that he may have to give to him that needethⁿ.” God has, in relation to the greater part of the world, appointed a connexion between industry and the possession of earthly comforts. He has told us, and we daily see the truth of it, that “the diligent hand maketh rich;” and that “idleness will clothe a man with rags.” I would, therefore, say to all, Be diligent in your respective callings; and account it not beneath you to exert yourselves to the uttermost in every work that is assigned you, whether it be intellectual, for the improvement of your minds, or corporeal, for the discharge of any inferior duties. I am not prepared to go the full length of a profound writer^o, and say, that, in the pursuit of happiness, “occupation is all:” but certainly a constant and diligent prosecution of our respective duties contributes essentially, in the very act, to the happiness of our minds, and ultimately, in its consequences, to the comfort of our lives. Nor will it in the least interfere with the exercises of true piety: for when St. Paul says, “Be not slothful in business,” he adds at the same time, “Be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord^p.”]

2. The wisdom of seeking after God—

[Diligence in the prosecution of earthly good may be defeated by a thousand unforeseen occurrences: but who ever failed in seeking after God? Moreover, many who have possessed the good things of this life, have afterwards, by untoward circumstances, been bereaved of them: but who, or what, can rob you of your God; who, if you really give yourselves up to him, has said, not only that “he will never depart from you, and that he will put his fear in your hearts, that you shall not depart from him^q?” Besides, in the full possession of earthly things you may have no comfort in them, by reason of pain of body or distress of mind: but in those seasons God will be nearer to you, and will impart his consolations to you more abundantly, in proportion as you need his gracious help^r. I say, then, Seek after God: seek him as a reconciled God in Christ Jesus: seek him, till he has revealed himself fully to your souls, and enabled you to say, “O God, thou art my

¹ Rom. xii. 11.

^m 2 Thess. iii. 10—12.

ⁿ Eph. iv. 28.

^o Paley.

^p See 1.

^q Jer. xxxii. 40.

^r 2 Cor. i. 5.

God^s." Then, without fear of contradiction, I will pronounce you happy; and if, in reference to earthly comforts, I must qualify my language, when I say, "happy are the people which are in *such* a case," I will, in the broadest and most unqualified terms, say, in reference to you, "Happy is the people whose God is the Lord."]

^s Ps. lxxiii. 1.

DCCXLI.

PRAISE TO GOD FOR HIS GOODNESS AND MERCY.

Ps. cxlv. 1, 2. *I will extol thee, my God, O King: and I will bless thy name for ever and ever. Every day will I bless thee, and I will praise thy name for ever and ever.*

THIS is one of the psalms, the verses of which successively begin with the different letters of the alphabet: and it is one in which (as in the five that follow it) there is nothing but uninterrupted praise and thanksgiving. It is as fine an exhibition of a spiritual frame of mind as any that can be found in all the Holy Scriptures: and we suppose, it is on that account that it was appointed by the Church to be read on Whit-Sunday, when the descent of the Holy Spirit, and his influence on the minds of the first Christians, are particularly commemorated. The subject contained it has so much of unity, that the whole of it may not unprofitably be brought under our review. In it we observe the disposition of David's mind towards God. He determined to praise God himself, and he wished all others to praise him also. On this he speaks with fixedness of mind, to the same effect as in another psalm, "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise^a." He regards the Messiah as his "King," who justly claims this tribute at his hands: and he determines to pay it "daily," and to the latest hour of his life, yea, and "to all eternity" also in a better world. Every succeeding generation of men he would wish to be occupied in that blessed employment; and gladly would he lead the band, that all creation might join him in one universal chorus.

^a Ps. lvii. 7.

But we will consider more distinctly the subjects of his praise. Having stated his determination to praise his God, he celebrates,

I. The perfections of his nature—

He mentions,

1. His greatness—

[This he declares to be “unsearchable^b :” and indeed it is so: for who can form any idea of his immensity? We speak of his filling all space; but in so speaking we only “darken counsel by words without knowledge.” If we look at his “works,” he is altogether incomprehensible there also: for, what conception have we of his calling forth into existence this terraqueous globe, together with all the heavenly bodies, and fixing them all in their order by a mere act of his will? Nor are the “wonders” of his providence less worthy of our admiration, seeing that his greatness is no less visible in upholding all things by the word of his power, than it was in the first formation of them. Even the most “terrible of his acts” are also fit subjects for praise, inasmuch as they display the terrors of his Majesty, who gets honour to himself as well in the destruction of his enemies, as in the preservation of his obedient subjects. Doubtless the judgments inflicted on the old world, and those also with which Egypt, and Sodom, and the seven nations of Canaan, were visited, were most awful: but yet, as vindicating the holiness of God, and displaying “the honour of his Majesty,” they are worthy to be contemplated with awe, and to be celebrated with the profoundest adoration^c.]

2. His goodness—

[This was a favourite topic with the Psalmist; and therefore in speaking of that he says, “They shall abundantly utter the memory of it.” See how every thing in the whole creation bears the stamp of God’s goodness! every thing so fitted to its use; every thing so conducive to the good of man, and to the happiness of the whole creation. Consider every thing as originally formed; there is not the minutest thing in the universe that could, even with all the experience of six thousand years, be altered for the better. See with what blessings all the returning seasons are fraught! Let every individual search the records of his life, and what unnumbered instances of God’s goodness towards him will he see! Surely, with David, we should “abundantly utter the memory of it,” so as to make it the prominent subject of all our meditations, and of all our discourse; and at the same time we should “sing of his righteousness,” in that, whilst he has given us innumerable blessings which we

^b ver. 3.

^c ver. 4—6.

never merited, he has never withheld one, which by his promises he had made our due^d.]

3. His mercy—

[In what has hitherto been spoken we are concerned as *creatures*: but in this attribute we are interested as *sinners*. And O! what reason have we to adore the tender mercy of our God! Who must not say with David, “The Lord is gracious, and full of compassion, slow to anger, and of great mercy?” Yes indeed, “He is good to *all*; and his tender mercies are over all his works^e.” David, it is true, had very abundant cause to sing of *mercy*: but, Who has not? Who that knows any thing of himself, is not penetrated with the deepest sense of God’s “grace,” in looking upon so vile a sinner; of his “compassion” towards him, when reduced to the most destitute condition; of his “patience,” in bearing with such manifold backslidings; and of his “great mercy,” in pardoning such innumerable transgressions? If we do not extol our God, and bless his name, yea every day, and all the day long, methinks “the very stones will cry out against us.”]

Having thus expatiated on the virtues of his King, David proceeds to bless him for,

II. The administration of his government—

Here the reference to Christ is more plain and direct. He is the King of Zion; and it is his kingdom that is established over the face of the whole earth. There is not any thing in the whole creation that is not benefited by his reign; but most of all his believing people. Hence David says, “All thy works, whether intentionally or not, shall praise thee,” (as any thing of curious workmanship praises the maker of it) “but thy saints shall bless thee,” having their whole souls turned to the delightful work^f.

1. It is a glorious kingdom—

[It is extended over heaven, earth, and hell. In heaven there are myriads who are the subjects of it, and who are ascribing all possible honour and glory to their Almighty King. On earth, his power is seen in every nation under heaven. The most potent monarchs bow down to him with the deepest reverence; whilst the most degraded savages are enriched with all the blessings of his kingdom. In hell, the principalities and powers, with Beelzebub at their head, confess his power, and are, however reluctantly, obedient to his commands. His

^d ver. 7.

^e ver. 8, 9.

^f ver. 10.

moral commands indeed they do not fulfil; but his positive injunctions they are unable to resist: they are constrained to yield up to him the spoil which they had once seized for themselves, and to flee even from the face of a poor helpless sinner, when once he sets himself, in dependence on Divine aid, to resist their tyrannic sway.

In this kingdom, every subject is himself a king; a king in this world; and entitled to a crown, a throne, a kingdom, in the world to come. Well then might David say of these subjects, "They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power; to make known to the sons of men his mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom^g."

2. It is also an everlasting kingdom—

[Other kingdoms have perished, and shall perish: but this shall endure for ever^h. Though it is as "a stone cut out without hands," and neither founded nor supported by human power, it "shall break in pieces all other kingdoms, and shall stand for ever and ever." "The gates of hell (with all their policy and power) shall never prevail against it;" no, nor against the meanest subject in it. Nay, when "the earth, and all that is therein, shall be burnt up and utterly dissolved," this kingdom shall continue in its utmost vigour; nor shall its prosperity languish as long as God himself shall endure.

What a theme for praise is here! O reflect upon it, all ye who believe in Jesus; and sing of it, all ye, who have sworn allegiance to his name.]

The Psalmist proceeds yet further to notice,

III. The operations of his grace—

Here the influences of the Holy Spirit come more immediately to our view. It is he who carries on the whole work of grace in the hearts of men, and fits them for the enjoyment of that kingdom that is prepared for them. Behold his operations;

1. How gracious!

[There is not a saint on earth whom he does not aid, according as his situation and circumstances require. "Are any fallen? he upholds them; and raiseth up all that are bowed down," whether with sin or sorrow. "The eyes of all are directed to him" as the only source of spiritual nourishment and strength; and "he gives them such a portion as they need, in the very season" that they need it. Yes; as in the kingdom of nature, God, as the father of all, "opens his hand, and satisfies the desire of every living thing," so, in the kingdom of his grace, he administers to every saint whatever is necessary

^g ver. 11, 12.

^h ver. 13.

for his consolation and supportⁱ — — — He will indeed “be inquired after for these things;” but He will “suffer none to seek his face in vain.” He “draws nigh unto all that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth:” or, if they be not able to express their wants in words, “he will fulfil their very desires;” yea, if only, as on any sudden emergency, they “cry unto him, he will hear their cry, and will save them.” How astonishingly kind and gracious are these declarations; and how suited to encourage his weak and drooping saints! It frequently happens that they can do little else than sigh and groan: yet even these expressions of their minds he will favourably receive, and richly recompense unto their souls^k — — —]

2. How righteous!

[Though God, as a sovereign, dispenses his gifts according to the good pleasure of his will, yet there is an equity in all his proceedings, whether of providence or grace: “gracious is the Lord, and righteous:” “he is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works^l.” We, from our pride and ignorance, are ready to accuse him of injustice, if he distinguish any as monuments of his grace. But though “he has mercy on whom he will have mercy, and has compassion on whom he will have compassion,” yet is there, in truth, no inequality in his ways: “*our* ways are unequal; but *his* are equal:” he invariably “rewards those who diligently seek him,” and “becomes the enemy of those only who rebel, and vex his Holy Spirit:” “he filleth the hungry with good things, and the rich only doth he send empty away.” He puts, as it becomes him, “a difference between those who serve him, and those who serve him not.” “They who love him shall be preserved,” though the whole universe were combined to destroy them: but “all the wicked,” whether old or young, rich or poor, “shall be destroyed:” “though hand join in hand, not one of them shall pass unpunished^m.”

Say now, Whether, in this view of the Deity, David’s purposes and desires were not highly commendable; “My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord; and let all flesh bless his holy name for ever and everⁿ.”]

From the perusal of this psalm, two REFLECTIONS naturally arise:

1. What an elevation of character does true religion produce!

[We would not speak in a degrading manner of any, and much less of those who are renowned for wisdom: yet who does not see how low and grovelling are the thoughts of statesmen

ⁱ ver. 14—16. ^k ver. 18, 19. ^l ver. 17. ^m ver. 20. ⁿ ver. 21.

and philosophers, in comparison of those which occupy the believer's mind? He soars, as it were, on angels' wings: he contemplates the subjects "which angels desire to look into:" "his conversation is in heaven." Brethren, let us not forget for what high destinies we are formed. The brute creation have their faces towards the earth, and have no conception of any thing but what belongs to earth: but man is made erect, with his face, as it were, toward heaven, whither he should always direct his views, and from whence he should expect all his happiness. Let us then think and speak as those who are partakers of a higher nature: and whilst the wise of this world content themselves with the subjects that relate to time and sense, let *us* explore the blessings of redemption, the mysteries of grace, and the glories of eternity.]

2. What loss do they sustain who live far off from God!

[It is the diligent and watchful Christian alone that feels the devout affections which are exercised in this psalm. Too many of those who profess religion are content with a low state of mind. They look upon the work of praise and adoration as rather to be desired than attained; as that which will engage them in heaven, rather than as that which they can be much occupied with on earth. The most of their devotions consist of formal lamentations on account of the deadness of their souls, and lukewarm petitions for pardon and acceptance. Ah! what enemies are these to their own welfare! They might enjoy a very heaven below; and yet scarcely exceed in happiness the people from whom they have come forth. O, Brethren, let it not be thus with you: aspire after high and heavenly things: be not satisfied without the brightest manifestations of God's love, and the richest communications of his grace: "Delight yourselves in God; and then he will give you the desire of your heart."]

DCCXLII.

THE GOODNESS OF GOD TO MAN.

Ps. cxlv. 8, 9. *The Lord is gracious and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy. The Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works.*

THE great mystery of the Gospel is that which ought chiefly to occupy the Christian's mind. But it is well occasionally to contemplate the Deity in a more enlarged view, as a God of providence and grace. The Psalmist in particular abounded in such "meditations," and found them exceeding "sweet" unto his soul. In the psalm before us his heart was

greatly enlarged; and I pray that our hearts may be enlarged also, whilst we consider,

I. The character of God, as here portrayed—

Let us view it,

1. Generally—

[Look at the state of the world around us. See how all mankind are involved in guilt and misery! See how incapable they are of restoring their fallen nature in any respect to purity or peace! But God Almighty is “gracious” unto them, for his own great name’s sake: and is “full of compassion” towards them, “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance and live.” Their rebellion against him is most daring and universal: yet does he “endure them with much long-suffering,” being “slow to anger, and of great mercy.” Were not this his character, another deluge would come and sweep away every living thing; or fire from heaven would descend, as on the cities of the plain, to consume us in an instant. But, instead of breaking forth in wrath to destroy us, he is daily loading the whole world with benefits. The most evil and unthankful of the human race are visited by him in mercy, and replenished by him with all things that are needful for them. Above all, he has given up his beloved Son, to die in the place and stead of his rebellious creatures, to expiate their guilt, and to make atonement for their sins. He has commanded his Gospel also to be preached to them, even to the very ends of the earth, and a free salvation to be offered to every child of man. In this respect he makes no difference between Jews or Gentiles: “He is good to all without exception; and his tender mercies are over all his works.”]

2. In our own personal experience—

[Where is there one amongst us who is not a living witness for God, in reference to these things? Who has had any claim upon him? Who has not, on the contrary, greatly offended him, and that times without number? Who cannot look back to some particular period of his life, when God might, if I may so speak, have cut him off with advantage, and made him a signal monument of his fiery indignation? And who, in the midst of all his rebellion, has not been loaded with benefits? Not only have we received temporal blessings in abundance, but spiritual blessings also; so far, at least, as we could be prevailed upon to receive them. We all have experienced the strivings of his good Spirit in our hearts and consciences: and if we would have listened to his voice, there is not one amongst us who should not have been guided into all truth, and been made a partaker of the salvation that is in Christ Jesus. He

has “waited to be gracious unto us;” and at this very moment does he follow us with his overtures of mercy, saying, “As I live, I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live. Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways: for why will ye die, O House of Israel?”]

From viewing the character of God, let us proceed to notice,

II. The reflections naturally suggested by it—

We cannot but see here,

1. Our base ingratitude—

[What might we justly expect to be the state of our minds towards such a God as this? Methinks, we might well be filled with wonder and amazement at his forbearance towards us, and be striving to answer all the purposes of his grace by turning towards him with our whole hearts. But how is it with us? We are, for the most part, altogether insensible of his mercy. We receive his benefits very nearly as they are received by the brute creation, without any distinct acknowledgment of him, or any heartfelt gratitude towards him. Scarcely of any mercy whatever are we sensible, but by the loss of it: when it is gone, we see what we *have* enjoyed: but, whilst we possess it, it makes very little impression on our minds. Even the great mercy of Salvation, that which fills all heaven with wonder, is scarcely contemplated by us at all. Perhaps in the whole of our lives, we never spent one hour in adoring him for the gift of his only dear Son, and in imploring mercy at his hands in the Saviour’s name! Say, Brethren, whether this have not been your sad experience? and whether it do not mark you as base—beyond expression or conception base?]

2. Our awful desert—

[Take only this view of your state, and then say what you deserve at the hands of a holy God. What would you think a fellow-creature would deserve at your hands, if he should deal thus with you? Suppose you had exerted yourselves all your days to make him happy, and *that* with unbounded beneficence and inconceivable self-denial; and suppose, that, notwithstanding this, he never testified any regard for you, never concerned himself about you, never sought to please you, never obeyed any of your commands, but trampled under foot your authority, and made use of all the favours which you heaped upon him, for no other end than to wound your feelings and cast dishonour upon your name: would you not say, ‘You are unworthy of my “compassion,” and shall be an object of it no longer. I have been “slow to anger” against you, and “of great mercy towards you;” but my patience is now exhausted, and can find no more scope for exercise. The mercies you

have so despised shall be now withdrawn, and you shall be left to eat the fruit of your own doings?' If, then, you would think this an equitable retribution from one creature to another, judge what is due to yourselves from the hands of an offended God. You need not ever have committed one heinous sin to subject you to the wrath of God: this ingratitude alone will justify the infliction of his heaviest judgments on your souls.]

3. The extreme folly of not turning unto God—

[Is God so full of compassion towards you, so patient, so long-suffering, so abundant in mercy; and will you withstand him to the uttermost, till his patience is come to an end, and "his mercy is clean gone for ever?" Nay, will you make use of all God's mercies for no better purpose than to aggravate your guilt, and to enhance your eternal condemnation? Think what reflections will press upon your mind in the eternal world, when your hope is perished, and you are lost without a remedy. How bitter will be the thought, that you thus wasted your day of grace, and constrained your God to "swear in his wrath that you should never enter into his rest." Methinks the recollection of these things will be the bitterest ingredient in that bitter cup which you will have to drink of to all eternity. Can you conceive, that if such tidings as now sound in your ears were sent to the heirs of perdition that are shut up in hell, they would be so slighted as they are with you? No, verily: there would be in them, at least, a desire to escape from their torment, even though they did not affect the felicity of heaven. But neither the allurements of heaven nor the terrors of hell can move you. I pray you, Brethren, "harden not your hearts any longer;" but "to-day, whilst it is called to-day," avail yourselves of God's proffered mercy in Christ Jesus, and "flee for refuge to the hope that he has set before you."]

DCCXLIII.

GOD'S READINESS TO ANSWER PRAYER.

Ps. cxlv. 18, 19. *The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth. He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him: he also will hear their cry, and will save them.*

ONE of the most endearing qualities of a monarch is, a readiness to listen to the petitions of his subjects, and to relieve, to the utmost of his power, their necessities. But no earthly potentate can be accessible to all; nor, if he were, could he supply their wants. God alone is competent to this great task.

With him there is no weariness, nor any defect either of inclination or of power. To him all may go, at all times, and under all circumstances: and, if they go to him, they shall find, by sweet experience, that "he is able to do for them exceeding abundantly above all that they can ask or think." Hence the name given to Jehovah by the Psalmist, is this, "O thou that hearest prayer." In the passage before us we are particularly led to contemplate God in this view. It is here said,

I. That he will hear the supplications of his praying people—

"The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him"—

[Never will he turn a deaf ear to a humble suppliant. We read not of so much as one whom the Lord Jesus turned away in the days of his flesh, provided only that he came under a deep sense of his own necessities, and a humble expectation of relief from him. So at this time there is no difference with respect to persons; God is ready to hear "all" without exception, whether those who have long approved themselves to him as faithful servants, or those who come to him for the first time in their whole lives — — — "He will be nigh unto them," the very instant they call upon him. But who can declare all that is contained in this expression? As to his actual presence, God is nigh unto all, whether they call upon him or not. It is of the manifestations of his presence that the Psalmist speaks: and those will God vouchsafe to the souls of his faithful worshippers in a variety of ways. He will "lift up the light of his countenance upon them:" he will shed abroad his love in their hearts by the Holy Ghost: he will give them the spirit of adoption, yea, and the witness of his Spirit, whereby they shall know that their prayers are both heard and answered. We do not now speak of such testimonies as were vouchsafed to Daniel, or Cornelius, but such as are promised in the prophecies of Isaiah to the Church at large: "Then thou shalt call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am^a." To judge of these assurances of our acceptance, we must have experienced them in our own souls. To those who have not known them they must of necessity appear little better than the dreams of a heated imagination. But whatever the ignorant may say, "if we draw nigh to God, he will draw nigh to us^b," and "will manifest himself unto us, as he does not unto the world^c."]]

^a Isai. lviii. 9.

^b Jam. iv. 8.

^c John xiv. 21, 22.

It is here however supposed, that we call upon him "in truth"—

[Prayer must be sincere, in order to find acceptance with God. We cannot hope that it shall prevail, if it proceed "from feigned lips." Of what value in the sight of God can a mere formal recital of words be? "It is in vain that we draw nigh to him with our lips, if our hearts be far from him." Or, supposing that we be earnest in our petitions, how can we hope that God will hear them, if we are hypocritically indulging any secret sins? David justly says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." By the prophet Isaiah, God speaks yet more strongly; "When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers I will not hear: your hands are full of blood^d." "God is a Spirit, and must be worshipped in spirit and in truth^e:" and to those who so worship him, is his promise of acceptance confined: "Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart^f."]]

To this general promise of hearing his people's prayers, is added an assurance,

II. That he will hear them even under circumstances that may be supposed most unfavourable to their acceptance with him—

Where there have been much previous meditation, and subsequent fluency of expression, we are inclined to hope, that our prayers have entered into the ears of the Lord of Hosts: but where these have been wanting, we are ready to doubt whether God will regard us at all.

But we are assured in our text that he will hear,

1. Our cries unpremeditated—

[There are many occasions that arise so suddenly as to preclude a possibility of previous meditation. Such was the danger to which Jehoshaphat was exposed in the very heat of battle, when the Syrians mistook him for King Ahab, whom they were especially commanded to search out and to destroy: they had actually compassed him round about; and Jehoshaphat had only time to cry out to God: yet behold, so instantaneously did God hear and answer, that in a moment "he was helped, and his enemies were moved to depart from him^g." Thus by ten

^d Isai. i. 15. and Prov. xxi. 27.

^e John iv. 24.

^f Jer. xxix. 12, 13.

^g 2 Chron. xviii. 30, 31.

thousand accidents may we be brought in danger of our lives, or by the devices of Satan be exposed to temptations that threaten to overwhelm and destroy our souls: but prayer will in an instant bring omnipotence to our aid. Look at Peter sinking in the waves: he cries, "Save, Lord; or I perish!" and, behold, the Saviour instantly stretched out his hand, and saved him: and so will that Almighty Friend do to us also, whatever our difficulties or dangers be, according to that blessed promise; "It shall come to pass, that, before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear^h."]]

2. Our desires unexpressed—

[It is but little than any man knows of his own necessities: and even those who know most of them, are often greatly at a loss to express their wants in prayer. There are times when the best of men feel their spirit straitened, and can utter their desires only in sighs and groans. This, I say, is the case with those whose knowledge is most enlarged, and whose abilities are most eminent. How then must it be with those whose intellectual powers are small, and who have never enjoyed the advantages of a liberal education? Will God confine his answer to their immediate requests? No. He knows the meaning of a sigh or groan, as well as if it were expressed in the most fluent language. He knows that at the very time when his people can say little else, than, "Lord, help me; God be merciful to me a sinner," they would, if they could, expatiate upon all their wants, and pour out their souls before him in the most enlarged petitions. Hence, in his answers, he regards, not so much their words, as their wants; and enlarges the measure of his gifts in proportion to the extent of their desires. Whatever can tend to the peace of their minds or the perfection of their souls, *that* he imparts in rich abundance, communicating infinitely "more than they can ask or thinkⁱ."]]

But, as in the former case it was supposed that the person calling upon him was sincere, so here it is supposed that the person, whose unpremeditated cries he hears, and whose unexpressed desires he fulfils, does really "fear him;" for it is that principle alone that can render their desires proper to be fulfilled, or their cries to be answered. Where the fear of God really is, there God's will, and God's glory, will alone be desired^k; and where they are the objects of our desire, however "wide our mouth be opened, God will fill it^l."]]

SEE from hence,

1. How wonderful is the condescension of God to his believing people!

^h Ps. lxxv. 24.

ⁱ Prov. xv. 8. and Eph. iii. 20.

^k Prov. xi. 23.

^l Ps. lxxxii. 10.

[What would a person, who feels his own incapacity to spread his wants before God, wish for? If God should say to him, Tell me what I shall say for your encouragement, what could the drooping sinner dictate more consoling to himself than what is spoken in our text? — — — Examine well in this view what God has spoken in another place; how strongly he depicts the hopeless state of the suppliant, and what effectual aid he promises to impart^m — — — and you will be prepared to estimate aright the promise in our text. Let none then give way to unbelieving fears, or be dejected because they find not in themselves all the liberty and fluency they could wish: but let the habitual desire of the soul be after God, and the bent of it be towards him on every emergency: then shall not one jot or tittle of this word fail of its full accomplishmentⁿ.

Let me very especially direct your attention to the climax which God is pleased to use in this place, for the purpose of encouraging his tempted people, and of magnifying his mercy towards them. In every member of the sentence he enlarges his promise; and, at the same time, lowers, as it were, the qualifications necessary for those to whom the promises are made: 'To them that "*call upon him in truth,*" he will "*be nigh.*" To those who only "*fear him,*" and cherish, as it were, a feeble desire towards him, he will be so gracious as to "*fulfil their desire.*" And lastly, if any, through the greatness of their necessities, or an overwhelming sense of their unworthiness, are unable to do more than utter a "*cry,*" he will listen to them, yea, and *save them* with an everlasting salvation. The sigh, the groan, the tear shed in secret, shall come up with acceptance before him; even as Jeremiah's supplication did from the low dungeon, when he said, "*Hide not thine ear at my breathing and my cry!*"

2. What bitter self-reproach will they feel, who live and die without prayer!

[One of the most bitter ingredients in that cup of God's wrath which will be put into the hands of those who perish, will be the reflection, that they might have had all the glory of heaven, if only they would have sought it in earnest prayer. When they once experience the torments of hell, they may cry ever so long for a drop of water to cool their tongue, but they will not be able to obtain it. How will they then curse their folly, that they neglected to cry, when they might have obtained all that they could possibly desire! The recollection of that word, "*Ask, and ye shall have,*" will be a dagger to their souls. Dear Brethren, do but think of this in time. Think on what easy terms, if we may so speak, heaven may be now obtained.

^m Isai. xli. 17, 18.

ⁿ Ps. xxxiv. 18.

^o Lam. iii. 56.

If only you truly “fear God,” and “call upon him in truth,” you may be perfectly assured that you shall never be cast out. If God, unsolicited, gave you his only-begotten Son to die for you, what will he refuse you when you call upon him? He may delay indeed for a time to answer you; but not beyond the fittest time. “Continue instant in prayer,” then, yea, “pray and faint not;” for God cannot resist the importunity of prayer. The unjust judge complied with the widow’s request at last: and “will not God avenge his own elect, who cry day and night unto him? I tell you, that he will avenge them speedily.”]

DCCXLIV.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF TRUSTING IN GOD.

Ps. cxlvi. 5. *Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God.*

HOW exalted was the frame of the Psalmist’s mind at the time he penned these words! “Praise ye the Lord. Praise the Lord, O my soul. While I live will I praise the Lord: I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being^a.” Who that reads these words does not envy him, and desire to be like him? But how shall we attain this frame? How did *he* acquire it? He had been contemplating the character of the Most High, and the interest which he himself enjoyed in the divine favour: and he records this as his decided testimony for the benefit of all future generations: “Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God.”

May the same benefit result to you, my Brethren, whilst I,

I. Confirm his testimony—

Doubtless a carnal mind can see no blessedness in such contemplations as these: but one who is taught of God will fully accord with this inspired penman, from a conviction that the person here characterized may assure himself of two most important facts:—

1. However numerous or powerful his enemies be, he can never be overcome—

[Were his confidence in himself, he might soon be vanquished. Peter has shewn us how weak the most intrepid

^a ver. 1, 2.

man is, when left to himself; for, after all his boasting that he was ready to die with his Lord and Master, he denied him with oaths and curses. Nor is a person at all more secure who trusts in any created power: for, however powerful a man may be, he may not be able to afford the assistance that is needed; or, if able, he may not be willing; or, if willing, he may change his mind; or, if fixed in purpose, he may be removed by death, when, of course, all his thoughts and purposes must perish^b. But the man who trusts in God has an ever-present, an ever-willing, an immutable, an all-sufficient help — — — No confederacy, whether of men or devils, can prevail against him who sanctifies the Lord God in his heart^c: “There is a wall of fire round about him,” that will both afford him protection, and destroy his every assailant^d. He may confidently challenge the whole universe: “If God be for me, who can be against me^e?” Whether it be his body or his soul that is assailed, he is equally secure: “No weapon that is formed against him,” whether wielded by men or devils, can ever prosper^f: “his God will be his shield and buckler^g,” and “he shall be more than conqueror, through Him that loveth him^h.”]

2. However enlarged his expectations be, he can never be disappointed—

[We cannot expect too little from man, or too much from God. God, in giving himself to us as our God, authorises us to expect from him all that he himself can do, so far as our necessities require it. He himself says to us, “Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill itⁱ. We cannot open it too wide. Take all the promises in God’s blessed word: take all that he has engaged for in his everlasting covenant; take all that the Lord Jesus Christ has merited in our behalf; take all that by any possibility we may ever need, for body or for soul, for time or for eternity; take all the glory and blessedness of heaven; take the very throne and kingdom of God himself; and put all this into one petition, and it shall all be given; not an atom of it shall ever be wanting to the believing suppliant, so far as his soul shall be capable of enjoying it. The Believer should not be straitened in himself; for he is not straitened in his God. His hopes can never be too large; for God is both “able and willing to do for him all, and above all, and abundantly above all, yea, exceeding abundantly above all, that he can either ask or think^k.”]

Such being the testimony here given us; namely,

^b ver. 3, 4.

^c Isai. viii. 12, 13.

^d Zech. ii. 5. with 2 Kings vi. 16, 17.

^e Rom. viii. 31.

^f Isai. liv. 17.

^g Ps. xviii. 2.

^h Rom. viii. 37.

ⁱ Ps. lxxxix. 10.

^k Eph. iii. 20.

that the man whose "*help*" is in God can *never be overcome*, and whose "*hope*" is in God can *never be disappointed*; let me,

II. Commend it to your special attention—

We suppose you all to wish for a participation of the Psalmist's happiness. To all of you, then, I would say,

1. Seek to know the character of Jehovah, as here drawn—

[We have not, in general, worthy conceptions of the Deity, either as a God of Providence or as a God of Grace. We do not at all realize in our minds his universal agency, or the tender care which he takes of his believing people, insomuch that not a hair falls from the head of any of them without his special permission. But see in what light the Psalmist viewed him, when he gave concerning him the testimony which we are now considering: "Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God; who made heaven and earth, the sea and all that therein is; who keepeth truth for ever; who executeth judgment for the oppressed; who giveth food to the hungry; who looseth the prisoners, and openeth the eyes of the blind, and raiseth them that are bowed down, and loveth the righteous, and preserveth the strangers, and relieveth the fatherless and the widow¹;" see all these diversified conditions; see the relief administered agreeably to the necessities of all; and then say, whether he be not happy who has this God for his help? If you had all the men upon earth engaged for your support, yea, and all the angels in heaven too, it were nothing in comparison of the blessings you enjoy. Only realize the thought, that every perfection of the Deity is occupied day and night in your behalf, for the express purpose of securing and consummating your eternal happiness; and you will need nothing more to render you completely happy, amidst all the diversified scenes of this vain and troublesome world.]

2. Seek to obtain an interest in him, as your God—

[Doubtless, unless he be your God, you can derive no comfort from the consideration of his perfections; for, whatever he may be to others, to *you* he will be only "a consuming fire^m." But how shall he be made your God? There is but one way, and *that* is by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ: for "to all that believe in Christ, is given the privilege of becoming sons of Godⁿ;" "and if sons, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ^o." Look then, and see what an

¹ ver. 5—9. ^m Heb. xii. 29. ⁿ John i. 12. ^o Rom. viii. 17.

interest Christ himself possesses in the Father's love: see all that the Father did for him: see him now sitting at the right hand of the Father, in inconceivable blessedness and glory. All this shall you also inherit together with him: for, "all things are yours, if ye be Christ's^p." Will ye not, then, come to Christ, and cleave unto him, and live by faith upon him? Methinks I need not urge this upon you: your own minds are already bent upon this; and you are determined, through grace, to renounce every thing in comparison of Christ, and to make him "all your salvation and all your desire."]

3. Make use of him for all the ends for which he has given himself to you—

[When once you can say, with David, "O God, thou art my God!" then carry to this almighty Friend your every want, your every wish. Lean not at any time to your own wisdom; and undertake nothing in your own strength. Look to your God for guidance, even in the most common affairs of life; and, in all the difficulties which you may be called to encounter, "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." Remember all that he did for "*Jacob, whose God he was*" — — — And remember the promise he has made to *you*; "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness^q." What though in yourself you be only as a worm? he says to you, "Fear not, thou worm Jacob; for thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and make the hills as chaff^r." Only make him "*your help*, and him *your hope*," and you have nothing to fear. Let nothing, on the one hand, be deemed too great to carry to him; nor, on the other hand, account any thing so small that you may engage in it without his aid. Let "Him work all your works in you^s," and you are safe, even as if you were already before his throne: for "you are in his hands, nor shall any be ever able to pluck you thence^t." To every one, then, who really and altogether relies on God, I will address that inspired congratulation: "Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thine excellency! Thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places^u."]

^p 1 Cor. iii. 22, 23.

^q Isai. xli. 10.

^r Isai. xli. 14, 15.

^s Isai. xxvi. 12.

^t John x. 28, 29.

^u Deut. xxxiii. 29.

DCCXLV.

THE EXTENT OF CHRIST'S COMPASSION.

Ps. cxlvi. 7, 8. *The Lord looseth the prisoners : the Lord openeth the eyes of the blind : the Lord raiseth them that are bowed down : the Lord loveth the righteous.*

AS David was a very eminent type of Christ, so was he inspired to prophesy of Christ : and, if we look no further than to the passages quoted out of the Psalms in the New Testament, we shall find, that he wrote as fully and as minutely respecting the Messiah, as any other prophet whatever, not excepting even Isaiah himself. He described *his person* as God and man^a. He declared the whole of *his work*, his first covenant engagements with the Father^b, his incarnation^c, together with his active obedience^d, and his unparalleled sufferings unto death^e. He foretold his resurrection^f, and ascension^g; his session at the right hand of God^h, and his final appearance to judge the worldⁱ. He proclaimed also *his offices*, as a prophet^k, priest^l, and king^m. We do not indeed find the psalm that is before us expressly cited in the New Testament : but the whole of it so accords with what is elsewhere spoken respecting himⁿ, and the very words of the text are so descriptive of what Christ himself declared to be the great end of his mission^o,

^a Ps. viii. 4. with Heb. ii. 6. and Ps. cx. 1. with Luke xx. 42. or Ps. xlv. 6. with Heb. i. 8.

^b Ps. xl. 6, 7. with Heb. x. 6, 7. ^c Ps. viii. 5. with Heb. ii. 7.

^d Ps. lxix. 9. with John ii. 17.

^e Ps. xxii. and lxix. with all the accounts in the Gospels.

^f Ps. xvi. 10. with Acts ii. 27. ^g Ps. lxxviii. 18. with Eph. iv. 8.

^h Ps. cx. 1. with Acts ii. 35. ⁱ Ps. cii. 26, 27. with Heb. i. 12.

^k Ps. lxxviii. 2. with Matt. xiii. 35.

^l Ps. cx. 4. with Heb. vii. 17. ^m Ps. ii. 6. with Heb. i. 5.

ⁿ Compare Isai. xlii. 6, 7. and xxxv. 5. with John ix. 32. and Matt. xi. 3—5.

^o Isai. lxi. 1—3. with Luke iv. 18, 21. N. B. *The foregoing passages are cited only for the satisfaction of the reader, and not with a view to their being incorporated with the discourse.* Nevertheless they would form the substance of a profitable discourse on Acts ii. 25. (“*David speaketh concerning him ;*”) in which it might be shewn *how copiously and how minutely* David speaks of the Messiah.

that we can feel no hesitation in interpreting it as relating to Christ.

In this beautiful description then of our Lord's compassion to man, we may observe,

I. Its boundless extent—

The calamities with which the human race are afflicted are very numerous; nor is there any trouble which the Lord will not either remove or sanctify, if we call upon him. But as the remedying of our *spiritual* maladies was the principal end of his coming, we shall direct our attention more immediately to them. In the words before us then we may notice his regards,

1. To the blind and willing slaves of sin—

[The world at large are in bondage to their lusts, and to that wicked one who leads them captive at his will; and they are shut up under a sentence of condemnation for their numberless violations of the law of God^p. Yet, so blind are they to their real state, that they cannot see, and will not believe it. Their cunning adversary has undertaken to be their guide, but has led them into the heart of the enemies' country, and, if mercy do not interpose, into the very jaws of destruction^q. But the Lord Jesus is not an unconcerned spectator of their misery: he is ready to weep over them as over the murderous Jerusalem: and even while they reject him, he "would gladly gather them, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings." He would give them an eye-salve, whereby they should be enabled to see clearly^r: he would cause their chains to fall off, and would say to them, go forth, and shew yourselves^s: yea, so desirous is he to exercise mercy towards them, that nothing but a determined rejection of his grace can involve them in final ruin.]

2. To penitents "bowed down" under a sense of sin—

[Whatever be the afflictions under which we groan, we may carry them all to him, with an assured expectation of sympathy and succour, since he is at all times "a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress^t." But if sin be our burthen, if a sense of guilt lie heavy on our conscience, if our indwelling corruption be to us as a putrid carcass from which we cannot get loose^u, and which causes us to lothe and abhor

^p Gal. iii. 23.

^q Alluding to 2 Kings vi. 18—21.

^r Rev. iii. 18.

^s Isai. xlix. 9. with Acts v. 18—20.

^t Isai. xxv. 4.

^u This is the idea alluded to Rom. vii. 24.

ourselves, we need not fear but that our Lord will soon come to our help: "He will never break a bruised reed or quench the smoking flax, but will bring forth judgment unto victory." The sighs and groans of a contrite soul will surely enter into his ears, and call forth his almighty aid. He may indeed for wise purposes suffer the pressure to be heavy and of long continuance^x, insomuch that the weeping penitent may be ready to say, "The Lord will not hear, neither will the Almighty regard me:" but at the fittest season he will interpose to revive the drooping spirit, and to "make the bones which he hath broken to rejoice:" "he will take the beggar from the dunghill to set him among the princes^y."]]

3. To "the righteous" who are delivered from the power of sin—

[They are justly deemed "righteous," who, in the habit of their minds, and the general tenour of their lives, are devoted to God. *Allowed* sin, of whatever kind it were, would exclude us from this number, and mark us as children of the devil^z: but if we be really clothed with the Redeemer's righteousness, and "walking not after the flesh, but after the Spirit," we need not fear to take to ourselves this honourable appellation^a. And if this character be ours, the Lord loves us, not merely as he does sinners in general, with a love of pity, but with a love of complacency: "he joys over us with joy, he rests in his love, he joys over us with singing^b." There is not any blessing which our souls can want, but his love will bestow it. We say not, That he will forbear to chasten us (for that would be a mark of hatred rather than of love^c) but, That he will deal with us in all things as a wise and tender parent, administering to us such things, in such a measure, at such a time, and in such a manner, as his unerring wisdom knows to be best for us.]

But we cannot rightly appreciate the Saviour's love, unless we notice particularly,

II. Its unremitted exercise—

Long before David existed in the world, our Lord had shewn forth all his love to his people in the wilderness; nor did he ever leave that ungrateful nation without abundant tokens of his regard. In the days of his sojourning on earth his whole life was spent in doing good to the most indigent and most unworthy. Nor has he yet suspended the exercise of his grace;

^x Ps. xxxviii. 2, 4, 6, 8, 21, 22. and cxlii. 6, 7.

^y 1 Sam. ii. 7, 8.

^z 1 John iii. 8.

^a Rom. viii. 1.

^b Zeph. iii. 17.

^c Heb. xii. 6—8.

he still manifests his regard to his people, and effects his purposes towards them,

1. By his providence—

[Wonderful are the ways whereby he accomplishes his own eternal counsels. The histories of Joseph and his family, and of Esther and the captive Jews, give us an insight into the things which are yet daily passing in the world. Many events appear to us casual and trifling: but the truth is, that not one is casual, not one is trifling: every the minutest circumstance is ordered by the Lord, and forms a link in the chain of his unerring providence. Not a hair of our head falls but by his appointment; and it remains with us to mark his dispensations with care, and improve them with diligence. Let any whose eyes have been opened, or whose souls have been liberated from spiritual bondage, look back and see the way by which they have been brought to the enjoyment of these mercies; and they shall find such a mysterious concatenation of causes and effects as will furnish them with matter of astonishment to all eternity.]

2. By his grace—

[It is not said in the text that the Lord *had* done or *should do* those particular things ascribed to him: but he is spoken of as actually doing them; so that there is no day, no hour, wherein he is not engaged in this blessed work. He makes his word effectual at this time, no less than formerly, “to turn men from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God.” At this time also he heals the wounded spirit, and sheds abroad his love in the hearts of his faithful people. What if his word have not as much energy as in the days of the Apostles? or his Spirit be not poured out in such an abundant measure? “Has he forgotten to be gracious, or, in anger, shut up his tender mercies?” Surely there are many in these days, who can say, I was once in bondage, but now enjoy liberty; I was blind, but now see; I was bowed down under a heavy load of temptation and corruption, but my strength has been renewed like the eagle’s; I once had no idea what was meant by the sealing of the Spirit, or the witness of the Spirit, but I have now received such tokens of my Saviour’s love, as have assured my mind, that my “Beloved is mine, and I am his.” Let it be known then that Christ is still communicating his blessings to his church, and that it is both our duty and our privilege to enjoy them.]

INFER—

1. How great is the folly and wickedness of those who neglect Christ!

[If our maladies were of a bodily nature, and relief were offered us, should we not be deemed insane if we despised it? And, if our benefactor had put himself to great expense and trouble to procure us that relief, would our contempt of him be thought a light offence? The application of this to our state is obvious. But let the energetic language of the text be marked: wherefore does the Psalmist no less than four times repeat the name of Christ? Is it not the more effectually to call our attention to him? and does not this in a very pointed manner reprove the sin of neglecting him? If then we would not greatly multiply our own sorrows, and rush on blindly to everlasting destruction, let us seek to experience his proffered mercies, and to become the objects of his unalterable love.]

2. How little reason is there for any one to entertain desponding fears!

[The state of those who are immured in dungeons under a sentence of condemnation, or are deprived of the faculty of vision, may be justly considered as desperate in the extreme, and as representing in very gloomy colours the condition of men's souls. But there is nothing impossible with God: our adorable Saviour is both able and willing to effect deliverance: and, if, like the woman in the Gospel, we have been bowed down under a spirit of infirmity for eighteen, or eighty, years^d, one word of his can instantly release us. And, if once we be interested in his righteousness, and renewed in the spirit of our minds, there is not any thing which we may not expect from him: if once he love us, he will love us to the end^e. Let none then say, There is no hope: but let us entertain worthy thoughts of our almighty Deliverer: for, however much our expectations of mercy may be raised, we can never be disappointed, if we put our trust in him.]

^d Luke xiii. 11, 12.

^e John xiii. 1.

DCCXLVI.

THE POWER AND WISDOM OF GOD.

Ps. cxlvii. 5—7. *Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite. The Lord lifteth up the meek: he casteth the wicked down to the ground. Sing unto the Lord with thanksgiving; sing praise upon the harp unto our God.*

AN acquaintance with God is the one object which we should seek after; since by that alone can we ascertain the extent of our guilt and danger; or be brought to accept the salvation offered us in the Gospel. In the passage before us we have a glorious

representation of him : and if we view him aright, our souls will be filled with unutterable peace and joy.

Let us consider,

I. The character of God as here declared—

He is here set before us,

1. In his essential attributes—

[He is a God of inconceivable power, and of infinite wisdom. View him in *the works of creation*, and see what an union of these two perfections is displayed both in heaven — — — and earth — — — Behold the same in all *the works of providence*, upholding every thing in its order, and accomplishing for every thing all that is necessary for its well-being — — — Behold it above all in *his works of grace*. Well is the Gospel called the “wisdom of God and the power of God^a.” Truly when man had fallen after the example of angels, it seemed impossible but that he must also share their doom. But infinite *wisdom* devised a way whereby mercy might be extended to sinners in perfect consistency with the rights of justice ; and the *power* of God has carried into effect that plan, “laying help for us upon One that was mighty,” and opening, through the sacrifice of his only-begotten Son, a way of acceptance with him for every child of man^b — — —

Had either of these perfections existed in him without the other, his power would have been an object of terror only, and his wisdom might have been exercised for us in vain. But their united exercise renders him a fit object for our most ardent love, and unbounded affiance.]

2. In his dealings with mankind—

[“The meek” are objects of his peculiar care. But under this name we do not comprehend those who are *naturally* of a calm and placid disposition ; but those who are humbled under a sense of sin, and abased before God as deserving his wrath and indignation^c — — — Now such as these “he lifteth up,” speaking peace to their souls, and causing their hearts to overflow with joy^d — — — If there were but one such person in the universe, God would search him out^e — — — and “raise him up out of the dust to set him among princes, and to make him inherit a throne of glory^f” — — —

On the other hand, “the wicked,” who hold fast their wickedness and refuse to humble themselves before him, “he will cast down to the ground,” and consign over to everlasting perdition^g — — — He will assuredly, and in all cases, carry into effect that determination which he has so often announced

^a 1 Cor. i. 24. ^b John iii. 16. 1 Tim. i. 15. ^c Isai. lxi. 1.
^d Isai. lxi. 3. ^e Isai. lxvi. 2. ^f 1 Sam. ii. 8. ^g Ps. ix. 17.

to us, of “abasing the proud, and exalting those who humble themselves before him^h — — —]

Let us now proceed to mark,

II. The effect which this view of him should produce upon us—

In this view should every living soul rejoice.

1. The wicked themselves—

[What a ground of joy should it be to them, that they are not, as they well might have been, shut up in hell, but that they have still an opportunity of embracing the salvation which infinite wisdom has devised: and almighty power is ready to impart! — — — To every such person I say, Compare your state with those whose day of grace has closed, and, amidst all your sorrows for your past sins, bless and adore and magnify your God, that it is yet “the day of salvation” to youⁱ, and that you have yet One following you with that blessed assurance, “Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out” — — —]

2. The meek in particular—

[Well does the Psalmist say to you, “Sing unto the Lord with thanksgiving; sing praise upon the harp unto our God.” Do but think what a *Protector* you have, even one who is infinitely wise to discover all that your great adversary is plotting for your destruction — — — and infinitely powerful to shield you from his fiercest assaults — — — Surely you may adopt the triumphant language of St. Paul^k, since, however weak you be, God has engaged to “perfect his own strength in your weakness” — — —]

Think too what a *Friend* you have, who will “supply your every want out of the fulness that is in Christ Jesus,” and employ all his wisdom and all his power for the enriching and comforting of your souls — — —

Lastly, think what a *Rewarder* you have, who has provided for you on earth whatsoever his infinite wisdom has judged best, and his almighty power can impart to make you happy — — — whilst in heaven is reserved for you an eternity of inconceivable and unutterable bliss — — —

I say then to you especially, “tune your harps to sing the praises” of your redeeming God — — — and live in the habitual and delightful anticipation of the blessedness that awaits you in a better world — — —]

^h Isai. ii. 11.

ⁱ 2 Cor. vi. 2.

^k Rom. viii. 35—39.

DCCXLVII.

GOD'S REGARD FOR THE LEAST OF HIS SAINTS.

Ps. cxlvii. 11. *The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy.*

IN the Psalms of David we have innumerable exhortations to praise our God. At the same time, we have innumerable grounds of praise set before us. In the psalm before us we are told how abundant he is in mercy both to the Church and to the whole creation; and that, whilst there is nothing of created excellence that merits his regard^a, "he takes pleasure" in those who manifest the very smallest symptoms of a new creation within them.

The words of my text are, in this view, worthy of peculiar attention. In them we see,

I. How low God stoops to the objects of his favour—

Had he spoken of himself as noticing angels, it would have been a wonderful mark of his condescension and grace: for "he humbleth himself when he beholds the things that are in heaven^b," and "chargeth even his angels with folly^c." But the persons whom he speaks of here, as objects of his favour, are of the lowest possible order of saints. In point of regard for God, they rise no higher than "fear;" and in point of confidence in God, they go not beyond a "hope in his mercy."

What can be lower than the mere "fear" of God?

[A person destitute of this has not the smallest evidence whatever of the divine approbation. He cannot have it. A man without the fear of God is a decided enemy to God; and God is, and must be, an enemy to him. A person, the very instant he is born of God, must of necessity fear to offend him, and endeavour, by a holy conformity to his will, to please him. After having made a progress in the divine life, he will attain to higher exercises of grace: but in this the lowest state of conversion, God will regard him as an object of his favour.]

And what lower attainment can we conceive, than a mere "hope in his mercy?"

[This supposes that a man feels himself a sinner, justly

^a ver. 10.

^b Ps. cxiii. 6.

^c Job iv. 18.

obnoxious to God's wrathful indignation. It supposes, too, that he despairs of ever being able to do any thing that shall conciliate the divine power: he sees and feels that he must entirely cast himself on the mercy of God in Christ Jesus. At the same time, he sees that there is a sufficiency for him in Christ; a sufficiency in his death to atone for all sin; and a sufficiency in his righteousness, to justify all who shall be clothed in it before God. With these views, he indulges a hope that even *he* may obtain mercy at God's hands; and on God's mercy he casts himself without reserve; determining, if he perish, to perish at the foot of the cross, imploring mercy of God for Christ's sake. Lower than this we cannot go: for if a person have not attained to this, he has not entered into the fold of Christ. He may be an outward-court worshipper; but on the threshold of God's sanctuary he has not so much as once set his foot.]

Yet, low as their condition is, the text informs us,

II. How high he soars in his regards towards them—

Had it been said that God would look with pity and compassion upon such feeble worms, it would have displayed in him a most astonishing extent of condescension and grace. But we are told, not that he will shew favour to them, and accept them, but that “*he taketh pleasure*” in them. Yet how can this be conceived? What can he ever see in them, that shall afford him pleasure? However little we may be able to conceive it, he does “*take pleasure*” in them: he takes pleasure,

1. In looking upon them—

[He himself draws this very character, and says, “*To this man will I look, even to him that is of a broken and contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word^d.*” If it be asked, What can he find in them to engage his regards? I answer, What can a mother behold in a new-born infant to engage her affections? The child, though so weak and helpless, is hers, a partaker of her nature, and an heir of her inheritance: and therefore she feels an intensity of interest in the child, and finds in the sight of it an exquisite delight.]

2. In answering their prayers—

[A mother understands the cry of her child, and needs no further incentive to fulfil its desires. And God, too, understands the sigh, the groan, the very look of his children, and

^d Isai. lvii. 15. and lxvi. 2.

will grant to them whatsoever they can desire, provided it be really conducive to their good. "Even before they call, he will answer; and while they are yet speaking, he will hear^e"——— The very image which I have here used to illustrate his grace, is that which he himself has employed; saying, that he will give them, as it were, to "suck of the breasts of his consolations, and bear them on his side, and dandle them on his knees, and comfort them in their troubles, as a mother comforteth her helpless and afflicted child^f."]]

3. In administering to all their wants—

[All heaven, as it were, shall be at their command^g. In the aid that he affords, God will exert himself effectually, even "with his whole heart and his whole soul^h:" and in the bestowment of his blessings, will rejoice over the beloved object with such a complacency and delight as God alone can feelⁱ.]

Are you, then, my Brethren, partakers of this character?

[Consider who it is that "has brought you to this self-same thing^k;" and endeavour to "render to him according to the benefits he has conferred on you." Say not, 'My attainments are so small, that they call for shame and sorrow, rather than for joy:' for "God does not despise the day of small things^l;" neither must ye despise it. Methinks the least that I can ask of you is this: If "God takes such pleasure" in you, take ye also pleasure in him. The more you "delight yourselves in him," the more assuredly shall you grow in every thing that is good, till you have attained "the full measure of the stature of Christ."]

But is there one amongst you that is not of this character?

[What pleasure can God ever take in you? Can he look with complacency on a rebellious man that does not "fear him," or on a self-righteous man that does not "hope in his mercy?" Impossible; for you counteract all the designs of his grace, and run, as it were, upon the thick bosses of his buckler, in your opposition to him. In such a state as this, what can you be but objects of his wrathful indignation, left for a season to fill up the measure of your iniquities, and to perish under an accumulated weight of misery? Let me, then, entreat you to seek the graces which are here specified. Beg of God, for Christ's sake, to "put his fear in your hearts;" and cast yourselves upon his mercy in Christ Jesus, "hoping even

^e Isai. lxxv. 24.

^g Jer. xxxi. 20. with Ps. xxxiv. 10.

ⁱ Zeph. iii. 17.

^k 2 Cor. v. 5.

^f Isai. lxxvi. 10—13.

^h Jer. xxxii. 41.

^l Zech. iv. 10.

against hope.” Then, notwithstanding your desert, you shall not perish, but have in yourselves an experience of that truth which God has revealed for the comfort and support of all his people, “that the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth from all sin.”]

DCCXLVIII.

TEMPORAL MERCIES A GROUND OF PRAISE ^a.

Ps. cxlvii. 12—14. *Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem; praise thy God, O Zion: for he hath strengthened the bars of thy gates; he hath blessed thy children within thee. He maketh peace in thy borders, and filleth thee with the finest of the wheat.*

THE common habit of mankind is, to rest in the gift, and forget the Giver. But we should make the gifts of God a ladder, as it were, whereby to ascend to him; and take occasion from every blessing he communicates, to magnify and adore that bounty from which it proceeds. Nor should we be so engrossed with our *personal* mercies, as to overlook those which are *national*. The pious Jews thought they could never sufficiently praise their God for his mercies vouchsafed to Israel. The theme that beyond all delighted them was, to recount the wonders of love and mercy which their nation had experienced from their first coming out of Egypt even to the day wherein they lived. Who was the author of this psalm we do not know: but it seems evidently to have been written after the return of the Jews from the Babylonish Captivity, and most probably in the times of Nehemiah, who rebuilt the wall of Jerusalem, and dedicated it to God with sacrifices and songs of praise^b. Certainly God’s interpositions for that people exceeded all that ever he did for any other nation: but next to Israel, methinks, we of *this* country may adopt the language at the close of

^a Thanksgiving Sermon for Peace, written January 18, 1816. It is not to be supposed that the same circumstances will ever occur again; and therefore the first intention of the author was to omit them altogether. But he conceives that the statement of them may serve to shew, how any *other existing* circumstances may be, not unprofitably, stated, when the occasion shall call for it.

^b Neh. xii. 27, 43.

this psalm, "He hath not dealt so with any nation^c." Let us consider,

I. The grounds here stated for praise to God—

We forbear to enter on the Jewish history for the elucidation of our text: intending rather to confine ourselves to the mercies which we are at this time called to commemorate.

Behold then what the Lord hath done for us! Behold,

1. The protection he hath afforded us *from without*—

[Not a country in Europe, except our own, but has suffered from the ravages of war: yet we, with our vast extent of coast, assailable from every port in Europe, and with every power in Europe at one time leagued against us, have been preserved from invasion; notwithstanding we were, far beyond any other nation, the objects of envy and hatred to our most powerful foe; and notwithstanding the immense preparations that were made by him for our destruction. But God has truly "strengthened the bars of our gates," so that they could not be forced; or rather "he himself has been a wall of fire round about us," so that not even any serious attempt has been made to invade our land. Other nations far less accessible than ours have been made scenes of most dreadful devastation^d; but with respect to us, such a restraint has been imposed on our enemies, that they could never carry into execution their cruel projects^e.]

2. The blessings with which he has loaded us "*within*"—

[He hath blessed us with *increase*, so that, notwithstanding the ravages of war, our population has greatly increased. With *union of sentiment* he hath blessed us to an extent almost unprecedented in our history. The whole nation have been fully convinced, that the war was both just and necessary, and that it was carried on, not for the gratifying of ambition, but for security and independence. With a *patient endurance of all the burthens* occasioned by the war, all ranks and orders amongst us have also been greatly blessed. It could never have been conceived that such contributions could have been raised without exciting the most grievous complaints: but they have been paid with liberality and cheerfulness from one end of the land even to the other. With a *respect for religion* also we have been blessed beyond any former period of our existence as a nation. The societies that have sprung up, in the very midst of war, for the diffusion of the Holy Scriptures throughout the

^c ver. 20.

^d Russia, in 1812.

^e Ps. cxxiv. 1—8.

world, for the conversion of both Jews and Gentiles to the faith of Christ, for the instruction of the rising generation, and for the promotion of piety in every possible way, have far exceeded all that had arisen during whole centuries before. Truly these things abundantly shew how greatly God has blessed us; insomuch that we may say, like Israel of old, “He hath not dealt so with any nation^f.”]

3. The restoration of peace in our borders—

[With only two short intervals, the war has continued five and twenty years: and now at last we are favoured with a peace, which, we hope and trust, will be of long continuance. It is not such a peace as has been often made, a peace no better than an armed truce; but one which our enemy will scarcely venture to violate, seeing that all Europe is leagued together for its preservation. To say that it is a favourable peace, is to disparage it altogether: for it infinitely surpasses all that our most sanguine or ambitious statesmen of former days ever ventured to desire. It has left us too in a state of elevation, prosperity, and power, which our country never before attained. And we have the happiness to say, it is universal, in India, no less than in America and Europe. Now is the happy time come, when we may “beat our swords into ploughshares, and our spears into pruning-hooks,” and “sit every one of us under our own vine and fig-tree, none making us afraid^g.”]

4. The abundant provision he has made for our wants—

[When an extraordinary plenty was predicted by the prophet Elisha in Samaria, the answer given him by the chief courtier was, “Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be^h?” or, in other words, “The thing is impossible.” In the same strain would any one have replied, if the existing state of things had been predicted as to be accomplished amongst us. But behold, we are, contrary to all reasonable expectation, so “filled with the finest of the wheat,” that the very cheapness of it creates a general embarrassment: and this singular phenomenon exists, that the only subject of complaint heard in the nation at this time is, that God has been too good to us, and has overwhelmed us, as it were, with his superabundant kindness and bounty. The promise made to Israel has been almost literally fulfilled to us: he has given us such abundance, that “we have scarcely room to receive itⁱ.”]

Such being the circumstances of *our* country at this day, let us consider,

II. Our duty arising from them—

^f ver. 20. ^g Mic. iv. 3, 4. ^h 1 Kings vii. 1, 2. ⁱ Mal. iii. 10.

Every blessing which God bestows, whether on nations or individuals, calls for a suitable tribute of praise and thanksgiving. Such a tribute are we at this time called to pay: "Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem; praise thy God, O Zion."

In order that we may discharge this debt for so many mercies,

1. Let us view the hand of God in them—

[As "war and pestilence and famine are judgments sent of God," so peace and all other national blessings are the gifts of his gracious providence. "There is neither good nor evil in a city, but it proceeds from God." Especially must he be viewed in all those great mercies which have been vouchsafed to us. Israel of old had not more abundant reason for the acknowledgments made by them, than we ourselves to adopt their strains^k — — — We are but too apt to be looking to second causes, and to be giving to the creature the honour that is due to God only. But let us be on our guard against this, lest we turn into a curse every blessing that has been bestowed upon us.]

2. Let us duly appreciate their value—

[It is not easy for us, who have seen so little the calamities of war, to estimate in any measure aright, either the protection we have experienced, or the peace which has terminated all our dangers. But, if we could go over a field of battle where myriads of the dead and dying are strewed upon the ground; if we could traverse whole provinces which have been desolated by fire and sword, where countless multitudes are reduced to the utmost possible distress and misery by their pitiless enemies; if we could see with what rapid strides pestilence and famine are following in the train of war; methinks we should need no exhortation to gratitude for the blessings we now enjoy.

True it is that spiritual blessings are of incalculably greater importance: and if we could say, that we had been protected from the incursions of sin and Satan—that we had been "blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly things in Christ Jesus;"—that we had been brought to a state of peace with God and in our own consciences—and that we enjoyed in rich profusion the bread of life—we should then have more abundant cause for praise. But we must not forget that our temporal blessings, especially when compared with the troubles which we might have been at this time enduring, have a most favourable aspect on our spiritual welfare; and that the more spiritual we are, the more disposed we shall be to acknowledge God's kindness towards us, whereinsoever it has been displayed.

^k See Ps. cxxiv. 1—8.

We must remember, too, that, as members of the great body of the nation, we are called to bless God for our national mercies. Now *national* mercies are of a *temporal* nature: no nation, *as a nation*, participates *spiritual* blessings, any further than the mere external enjoyment of them: individuals alone have the grace of God in their hearts: and therefore, as members of the national body, we are bound, in whatever capacity we have received God's mercies, in that capacity, as far as possible, gratefully to requite them.]

3. Let us render unto God the tribute they demand—

[“Praise” is surely the least that we can render for such accumulated blessings: and this, as is observed in the psalm before us, is “both comely and pleasant¹.” Behold how Moses adored God for the deliverance of Israel from the Egyptian hosts^m! See how David makes every distinct blessing a subject of distinct acknowledgment, and no less than twenty-six times in as many short verses ascribes every thing to the free and everlasting mercy of his Godⁿ! And as David elsewhere calls on every rank and order of society to discharge that debt to God^o, so in our text both “Jerusalem and Zion,” both priests and people, are called upon to praise the Lord: yea, the psalm both begins and ends with this just requirement, “Praise ye the Lord; praise ye the Lord.” Let every one amongst us then stir up his soul to this blessed work; and “let all that is within us bless his holy name.”

Let us not however rest in acknowledgments, however devout. There is a more substantial way in which we are bound to praise him, that is, in our lives, “by giving up ourselves to his service, and by walking before him in holiness and righteousness all our days.” This is the union which God himself prescribes; “Who-so offereth me praise, honoureth me; and to him that ordereth his conversation aright, will I shew the salvation of God^p.”]

¹ ver. 1.

^m Exod. xv.

ⁿ Ps. cxxxvi. See particularly ver. 1, 2, 3, 26.

^o Ps. cxxxv. 19—21. and cl. 1—6. ^p Ps. l. 23.

DCCXLIX.

GOD'S PEOPLE NEAR UNTO HIM.

Ps. cxlviii. 14. *A people near unto Him.*

THE Psalmist, wrapt in ecstasy, is here calling upon the whole creation to praise God. He addresses himself to all creatures in heaven and in earth, rational and irrational, animate and inanimate, to render

to their Creator that honour of which they are capable. Last of all he addresses "the saints," "whose horn God has exalted with peculiar honour," to abound in this duty; to which, indeed, they are called far more than even the angels themselves. The angels may well magnify his name, for forming them so holy, for making them so happy, and especially for preserving them from falling; when myriads, as high and holy and happy as themselves, fell from their first estate, and plunged themselves into irretrievable and endless woe. But they cannot speak of Redeeming Love. They know nothing of pardon; of pardon bought with blood; and that blood the blood of God's co-equal, co-eternal Son. They know nothing of a righteousness wrought out for them by God in their own nature: and hence it is observable, that, in heaven, whilst the redeemed "stand round about the throne," "the angels stand round about the *elders*," and consequently at a greater distance from their God. This was intimated by the admission of the Children of Israel into the courts of the Temple; whilst no Gentile, of whatever rank, or under any pretext whatever, was admitted there, except into the court especially assigned to them. This was intended to shadow forth that spiritual nearness to God which his saints alone can either enjoy or conceive. They alone, of all the children of men, answer to the description given in the text; they are near to him,

I. By relation—

[God has from eternity "chosen them in Christ Jesus," and "predestinated them to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself^a." In due season he called them by his word, and begat them by the incorruptible seed, the word of God; so that they are actually "partakers of the divine nature^b;" and are, in the most strict and comprehensive sense, "sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty." He has yet further united them by faith to his only-begotten Son; so that they are become one with him, one in nature, "members of his body, even of his flesh and of his bones^c;" yea, and one spirit with him too; for "he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit^d."

Of all this, not one syllable can be spoken by the world at

^a Eph. i. 4, 5. ^b 2 Pet. i. 4. ^c Eph. v. 30. ^d 1 Cor. vi. 17.

large: it is all the peculiar and exclusive privilege of the saints; who, from having been “strangers and foreigners, like others, have been made fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God^e.”]

But they are also near to him,

II. By choice—

[It is certainly true, that “they have not chosen God; but God, in the first instance, chose them^f.” It is true, also, that they have been “drawn by the Father” himself to the state in which they stand^g. They have, however, been drawn, not as stocks and stones, but “with the cords of a man, and with the bands of love^h;” and they have been made “a *willing* people in the day of God’s powerⁱ.” They no more serve *God* by compulsion, than they served *Satan*. They were free agents in their former state; and they are so still. They come to God in Christ, and “offer up their whole selves to him as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God as a reasonable service^k.” They wish to be entirely and altogether his, “sanctified wholly unto him in body, soul, and spirit^l.” Were it in their power, they would have “every thought of their hearts captivated to the obedience of Christ^m.” This they would account perfect freedom: it is the freedom and felicity of heaven; and every approach to it they regard as a heaven upon earth. Could they attain their perfect wish, they would be ever with, and altogether like, him; being “holy, as he is holy; and perfect, as he is perfect.”]

In consequence of this choice, they are also near to him,

III. By habit—

[They live as ever in his presence, and as “seeing Him who is invisibleⁿ.” When they lie down to rest, they commit themselves altogether to his care. “When they wake in the morning, they are still with him^o,” and he is present to their minds. With him they hold sweet converse, not only in the stated seasons of prayer, but throughout the day. They “set him always before them;” and “whether they eat or drink, or whatever they do, they do it to the glory of his name.” “In him they live and move and have their being.” They “walk with him, even as Enoch did^p;” consulting him in all their doubts, relying on him in all their difficulties, and receiving both good and evil at his hands. So intimate and continued is

^e Eph. ii. 19.

^f John xv. 16.

^g John vi. 44.

^h Hos. xi. 4.

ⁱ Ps. cx. 3.

^k Rom. xii. 1.

^l 1 Thess. v. 23.

^m 2 Cor. x. 5.

ⁿ Heb. xi. 27.

^o Ps. cxxxix. 18.

^p Gen. v. 24.

their fellowship with him, that "they dwell in God, and God in them; they are one with him, and he with them^a." In a word, "Christ liveth in them," and "is their very life;" so that it is "no longer they that live, but Christ that liveth in them;" so entirely do "they live the life which they now live in the flesh, by faith in the Son of God, who hath loved them, and given himself for them^r." To them, in a measure, is the Paradisiacal state restored; so that "they walk altogether, as it were, in the light of God's countenance^s."]

IMPROVEMENT—

1. What cause, then, have the saints for *gratitude*!

[Are you brought to this state? Remember in what state you once were: you were once as far from God as any of the human race are at this hour; and you would have been as far from him as hell itself, with an impassable gulph between you, if he had not mercifully interposed by the blood of his Son, and the operations of his Spirit, to prevent it^t. When, therefore, you look at others of the human race, and see the difference which Divine Grace has made between you, say, 'Why ME, Lord? why ME?' You cannot but see that "some are taken, and others left^u:" and you can trace this to no cause but the sovereign grace of God. Are *you* then taken? O! admire and adore the grace of God; and let your adoration be such as is observed amongst the heavenly hosts: they "fall upon their faces," whilst they sing^x. Do ye likewise so: let there be no self-preference or self-complacency in you; but let God be magnified, and your souls be abased in the dust.]

2. What cause have they, too, for shame!

[It is surprising that persons thus highly favoured should ever be found at a distance from God. But the very best of men have hearts "bent to backslide from God," and to "start aside, even as a deceitful bow^y." Who amongst you, Brethren, is not sensible of this? You can know little of your own hearts, if you do not see it; and little of God's grace, if you do not bitterly lament it. Ah! be ashamed, that ever your desires after God should languish, or your delight in him abate. Stir up yourselves, Brethren, and beg of God to quicken you; that you may correspond fully with the description in my text, and be at all times "a people near to him." See how he complains of you in relation to this matter: "O that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways! I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries. I would have fed them also with the

^a John vi. 56. and xiv. 23. ^r Gal. ii. 20. ^s Ps. lxxxix. 15.

^t Eph. ii. 13.

^u Matt. xxiv. 40, 41.

^x Rev. vii. 11.

^y Hos. vii. 16. and xi. 4.

finest of the wheat; and with honey out of the rock would I have satisfied them^z." Yes; you cannot but know whence it is that your strength is so small, and that your consolations are so few. It is altogether owing to your not walking more closely with God: for, if you were near to him, as you should be, your souls should overflow with all manner of good; according to that promise which he has given, "The faithful man shall abound with blessings^a."]]

^z Ps. lxxxi. 13, 14, 16.

^a Prov. xxviii. 20.

DCCL.

JOY IN CHRIST.

Ps. cxlix. 2. *Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King.*

IT appears somewhat strange that a religion coming from heaven, and purporting to make men happy, should almost universally be considered as a source of melancholy, and as destructive of all personal and social comfort. But it may be easily accounted for: religion calls men from the pleasures of sin, and promises them sublimer pleasures in its stead. But unregenerate men, knowing nothing of spiritual joy, have no idea that any such thing exists; whereas the joys, which they are to sacrifice, have afforded them many a delicious feast. Hence, till, through faith in the divine records, they feel the bitterness of sin, or taste the felicity of God's chosen, they will and must suppose, that they are called to relinquish what is substantial, and to grasp a shadow. But the saints of old have invariably attested, that religion's ways are ways of pleasantness and peace: and David, who was no incompetent judge of this matter, exhorts every subject of the Redeemer's kingdom to rejoice in Zion's King. We shall,

I. Explain his exhortation—

Who are the children of Zion?

[Not every man by nature, seeing we are "children of wrath^a;" not any man by education, since it is beyond the power of man to convey to others such principles and dispositions, as are necessary to bring them into that near relation to

^a Eph. ii. 3.

the Church of God^b: we must be born from above, through the influence of God's word and Spirit^c; and till a supernatural change has been wrought on all the faculties of our souls by God himself, whatever we may profess to be, we are, beyond a doubt, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel^d.]

Who is their King?

[It is to Christ alone that this name belongs^e. He is indeed the King of all the earth, and has the whole creation under his control. But, in this sense many are his subjects who despise his person and hate his government: whereas over Zion he reigns by the most cordial consent of all his people, there not being so much as one who does not know him, love him, serve him, and desire the very thoughts of his heart to be subjected to his law. On the other hand, he affords them his protection, supplies their every want, and makes them victorious over all their enemies.]

What is their duty towards him?

[It is not sufficient that they yield obedience to his will, as slaves to a tyrant whom they fear: they must love his person, delight in his commands, be zealous for his glory, and rely humbly on his care. In a word, they must rejoice in him. This is essential to the Christian character^f: and, if we attain not to this spirit, we are more inexcusable than the Jews, and obnoxious to a heavier doom^g. We say not indeed that the children of Zion are never to mourn: for mourning is both introductory to joy, and consistent with it; yea, it is even a very necessary ingredient of that joy, which we ought to feel in the contemplation of Christ's character and offices: and the more fervently we love him, the more deeply shall we lament, that our love and joy are so disproportioned to his worth.]

The several parts of the exhortation being explained, we shall,

II. Enforce it—

Here, changing only the order, each part that has been explained, suggests a powerful argument for rejoicing in Christ. Consider,

1. The duty itself—

[What can be more *pleasant*? It is not to any painful duty we are called, but to rejoice, and to have all the faculties of our souls engaged in the very employment of heaven. What can be more *reasonable*? If religion furnished us with no

^b 1 Cor. iii. 7. John i. 13.

^c 1 Pet. i. 23.

^d 2 Cor. v. 17. John iii. 5.

^e Zech. ix. 9.

^f Phil. iv. 4. and iii. 3.

^g Deut. xxvii. 45, 17.

grounds of joy, or were as empty and unsatisfying as the world, it would be unreasonable to expect any happiness to flow from it: but it sets before us innumerable occasions of joy; and not only permits, but enjoins, us to bear our part in the felicity of God's chosen. Shall we not then obey the call?]

2. The object in whom we are to rejoice—

[This is none other than our adorable Emmanuel, who combines in himself all the perfections of the Godhead, and all the excellencies of the most spotless manhood. Moreover, the love he has manifested towards his subjects, is such as infinitely surpasses our highest conceptions: he assumed our nature, and died for us, while we were in actual rebellion against him. And what a delightful sway does he exercise over them! So light and easy is his yoke, that there is not one of his laws, no, not one, which may not be summed up in this, *Be happy*. What rewards too does he bestow, not on a few favourites only, but on all his subjects! There is not one of them whom he does not make a king like unto himself, and place upon a throne like unto that on which he himself is seated at the right hand of God^h. Shall we refuse to rejoice in such a King as this?]

3. The persons called upon to rejoice—

[If this exhortation were addressed to the children of this world, they might reply, We know him not; we see no beauty in him for which he is to be desired; nor have we cause to expect any thing at his hands but wrath and fiery indignation: how then shall we rejoice in him? But the children of Zion know that “he is fairer than ten thousand, and altogether lovely:” they have experienced the virtue of his blood to purge a guilty conscience, and the efficacy of his grace to sanctify a polluted heart. For them he makes continual intercession in the presence of God; for them he every moment exercises his almighty power; and for them he is coming shortly to judge the world, that he may take them to himself, to behold his glory, and participate his blessedness, for ever and ever. Shall *they* then be reluctant to comply? Surely, if they be, “the very stones must cry out against themⁱ.”]

ADDRESS—

1. To those who have never yet rejoiced in Christ—

[What relation can you have to Zion? How can it be said of you, This man was born in her^k? And what excuse can you urge before God? Your ignorance of Christ? This is your sin, and not your excuse. He is willing to make you happy under his government, if you will submit yourselves unto

^h Rev. i. 6. John xiv. 3.

ⁱ Luke xix. 40.

^k Ps. lxxxvii. 5, 6.

him. "Kiss him" then, in token of your reverence and subjection, "lest he be angry, and ye perish for ever¹."

2. To those who are going on their way rejoicing—

[Take care that you make Christ, and not your own frames or feelings, the object and ground of your joy. And guard against pride, self-confidence, and sin of whatever kind, knowing that such things will vitiate, and destroy, all the happiness of the soul. David's advice must ever be attended to, "Rejoice with trembling^m."]]

¹ Ps. ii. 12.

^m Ps. ii. 11.

DCCLI.

THE DUTY OF PRAISING GOD FOR HIS GOODNESS.

Ps. cxlix. 4—6. *The Lord taketh pleasure in his people: he will beautify the meek with salvation. Let the saints be joyful in glory: let them sing aloud upon their beds. Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand.*

THE world are ready to account those weak and enthusiastic who abound in the exercise of spiritual duties: but there is nothing in the universe that more accords with the dictates of reason, than such a state. If God have not given us sufficient grounds to love and serve him, then we may doubt whether the supreme affection of our souls be due to him. But we need go no further than the text in order to justify the warmest expressions of our love to him, and the most unreserved dedication of all our powers to his service.

The exhortations in the text are full of energy; but they are founded on God's love to us. In order therefore to be duly sensible of their force, we must consider,

I. God's kindness to us—

This is expressed both by the internal regard which he bears towards us, and by the outward manifestations of it to our souls.

1. He loves his people—

[They who fear God are considered as "*his people*," in contradistinction to those who belong to Satan. He esteems them as "*his peculiar treasure*^a." He "*has pleasure*" in *their persons*, notwithstanding all their vileness; for he views them as

^a Exod. xix. 5.

“complete in Christ^b.” When they are mourning and weeping for their extreme sinfulness, he looks on them with heartfelt complacency^c, and delight^d. Even when they are doubting his love towards them, he marks them as the objects of his tenderest affection and incessant care^e.

He takes pleasure also *in their services*. Their prayers are his delight^f: their tributes of praise are esteemed his glory^g; their alms, a sacrifice with which he is well pleased^h: their every grace is in his sight of great priceⁱ. Their holy purposes, though not suffered by him to be carried into effect, are noticed by him with approbation^k, nor are even their fainter inclinations^l, or their transient thoughts^m, suffered to pass without a suitable reward.]

2. He makes them lovely—

[The distinguishing characteristic of the Lord's people is, that they are “meek:” their hearts being humbled, their proud impetuous passions are hushed to silence. These the Lord “beautifies with salvation” *now*. The lion becomes a lambⁿ: instead of the brier and thorn, the fir and myrtle-tree spring up^o: and even blood-thirsty murderers become humble and loving saints^p. The very countenances of God's people often bear a visible mark of the change wrought in them; so that we may almost literally say, “They have the mark of the Lamb in their foreheads^q.” There is a beautiful symmetry discernible in all their conduct. “The beauty of the Lord their God is upon them^r,” and as that consists, not in the exercise of any one perfection, but in an union and harmony of all, however opposite to human appearance; so their beauty is seen, not in the exercise merely of meekness or fortitude, of fear or confidence, but in the just temperament, and combination, of every Christian grace. In a word, they are renewed after God's image^s; and have the change carried on from one degree of glory to another by the Spirit of the Lord^t.

But in an infinitely higher degree will they be beautified *when their salvation shall be complete*. Then they shall have no remains of sin or corruption: their bodies shall be made like unto Christ's glorious body^u: their souls also shall be without spot or blemish as truly as his^x: arrayed in the robes of his perfect righteousness, and adorned with a crown of glory^y, they

^b Col. ii. 10.

^c Isai. lxvi. 2. Jer. xxxi. 18, 20.

^d Prov. xi. 20.

^e Isai. xlix. 14—16.

^f Prov. xv. 8.

^g Ps. l. 23.

^h Heb. xiii. 16.

ⁱ 1 Pet. iii. 4.

^k 1 Kings viii. 18, 19.

^l 1 Kin. xiv. 13.

^m Mal. iii. 16.

ⁿ Isai. xi. 6.

^o Isai. lv. 13.

^p Acts ii. 23, 41—47.

^q Rev. xxii. 4.

^r Ps. xc. 17.

^s Eph. iv. 24.

^t 2 Cor. iii. 18.

^u Phil. iii. 21.

^x Eph. v. 27.

^y Rev. vi. 11. and vii. 14. 2 Tim. iv. 8.

shall shine forth above the sun in the firmament for ever and ever^z. And when Christ himself shall come in his glory, he will be admired *in* them, and glorified *in* them^a.]

After viewing the obligations we owe to God, we cannot but be prepared to hear,

II. Our duty to him—

There is a correspondence between the mercies we receive from God, and the service which he requires at our hands: Does he take pleasure in us? we should delight ourselves in him: Does he exert himself to beautify us? we should labour to glorify him.

1. We should delight ourselves in God—

[They whom God has set apart for himself as “his people,” and rendered “meek” after the example of Jesus, are properly called “his saints:” and though men scoff at that name, and make it a term of reproach, they whom God has honoured with it, have reason to rejoice and glory in such an honourable appellation. With *them*, praise should be the subject of their thoughts, the language of their lips, the very element in which they breathe^b. It is their privilege as well as their duty to rejoice in the Lord, to rejoice in him evermore^c, to rejoice in him with joy unspeakable and full of glory^d. When they rise in the morning, their praise should ascend up as incense; yea, when they are lying “upon their beds,” they should have their waking thoughts occupied with God, and “sing aloud” for joy. Nor should they be contented with the solitary expressions of their love to God: they should commend him to others, and stir up all around them to magnify his name. Such was the delightful employment of the Psalmist^e; and such a devotedness of soul to God is no other than our reasonable service^f.]

2. We should fight the Lord's battles—

[The Jews were to approve their love to God by extirpating his enemies among the heathen. There are enemies also with whom he requires *us* to contend: but “the weapons of our warfare are not carnal:” it is not our fellow-creatures that we are called to destroy, but “the lusts that war in our members.” The world, the flesh, and the devil, are our enemies, and God's. Against them we vowed eternal enmity in our baptism; nor are we ever to sheathe the sword till they are all put under our feet. God has prepared for us a divine

^z Dan. xii. 3. Matt. xiii. 43.

^b Ps. xxxiii. 1. ^c Phil. iv. 4.

^e Ps. lxiii. 3—6. and xvi. 1—4.

^a 2 Thess. i. 10.

^d 1 Pet. i. 8.

^f Rom. xii. 1.

panoply, an armour of heavenly temper^g. Clad with this, we must “go forth continually conquering, and to conquer.” We must “fight a good fight,” and “war a good warfare^h,” and “endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christⁱ.”

Thus *fighting and singing must be joined together*; for “the joy of the Lord is our strength^k,” and then shall we be most victorious, when we go forth to battle singing the praises of our God^l.]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who rest satisfied with a mere formal religion—

[What suitableness is there in such a state to the mercies we receive at God’s hands? If he take pleasure in us, should we be indifferent towards him? If he labour to beautify us, should we take no pains to glorify him? If he call us to holy joy, should we be cold or lukewarm? If he command us to maintain a continual warfare, should we yield ourselves willing captives to our enemies, or make a truce with them for a moment? Be it known, that whatever the world may think of such a state, God utterly abhors it^m.]

2. Those who profess to serve and enjoy God—

[Glorious indeed is “the vocation wherewith ye are called:” and well may you rejoice in it: but oh! be careful also to “walk worthy of itⁿ.” If you profess that God has pleasure in you, take care that you are also adorned and beautified with his divine image. If you rejoice and glory in God, take care also that the sword is ever in your hand, to cut off whatever is displeasing in his sight^o. Beware also lest you decline from the happy state to which you have been brought: beware lest, by cowardice or sloth, you rob your soul of its beauty and happiness, and make him your enemy, who desires nothing so much as to shew himself your friend^p.]

^g Eph. vi. 13—17.

^h 1 Tim. i. 18. and vi. 12.

ⁱ 2 Tim. ii. 3.

^k Neh. viii. 10.

^l 2 Chron. xx. 21—23.

^m Rev. iii. 16.

ⁿ Eph. iv. 1. ^o Matt. xviii. 7—9. ^p Isai. lxiii. 10.

DCCLII.

THE DUTY OF PRAISING GOD.

Ps. cl. 6. *Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord.*

GREATLY diversified has David’s experience been, as depicted in the Book of Psalms. Sometimes we

find him bowed down under a sense of sin, and sometimes sunk almost in the depths of despondency: but here we view him elevated as on Mount Tabor, and breathing, as it were, the very atmosphere of heaven. It should seem as if all the concluding psalms had been penned at the close of life, when his soul was altogether ripened for glory. In all the five last psalms he speaks the language of praise. Every one of them begins and ends with Hallelujah, that is, "Praise ye the Lord." In the psalm before us, short as it is, he repeats his exhortation no less than thirteen times. O that he might not repeat it in vain! O that we might "drink into his spirit," and be transported, like him, with love and gratitude, with adoration and thanksgiving!

Be it known, that,

I. God deserves all imaginable praise from his creatures—

[What perfection of the Deity is there, which, if duly contemplated, is not a fit subject for praise? His goodness, his mercy, his loving-kindness, his truth, and faithfulness, call for the loudest praises of all his creatures ——— The same we may say of his justice too: for though to ungodly men it is a formidable attribute, yet to the creation at large it has a bright and favourable aspect, inasmuch as it is adverse to nothing but what is hostile to the interests of the whole intelligent creation ———

But contemplate God in the person of his Son: think of him as assuming our nature, and expiating our sins by his own blood upon the cross, and as becoming the living Head of all his believing people, and, finally, as engaged to "perfect that which concerneth them," and to preserve them blameless to his heavenly kingdom: think of him, I say, in all that he has done and suffered for a ruined world, and in all that he has engaged to do for those who trust in him, and then say, whether the tongues of men and angels be sufficient to declare his goodness, or whether eternity itself will suffice to utter all his praise^a? Surely it is well and justly said, that "his name is above all blessing and praise^b."]]

Yes,

II. There is not "a thing that breathes" which has not abundant occasion to praise him—

^a Ps. cvi. 2.

^b Neh. ix. 5.

We speak not of irrational beings (though they do praise him according to their ability;) but of “man, into whose nostrils God originally breathed the breath of life^c.” Of all the children of Adam without exception we say, that they have reason to praise their God. This is true of,

1. Those who are yet in heathen darkness—

[Innumerable are the blessings which they enjoy. The constitution of their bodies and the faculties of their souls are fit subjects for adoration and thanksgiving — — — The various blessings provided for the maintenance and support of man, call also for the most grateful acknowledgments^d — — — There is no man whose comforts do not far exceed his deserts.]

2. Those who enjoy the light of Revelation—

[Unspeakable are the blessings with which they are favoured. The revelation given to the Jews was dark and shadowy; yet *that* is spoken of as an inestimable benefit conferred upon them^e: what thanks and praise then should *we* render unto God for the clearer light of his Gospel! O, what wonders of love and mercy are there revealed! How plain is the instruction there given to all who desire to have their feet guided into the way of peace! Whoever perishes for lack of knowledge now, must confess, that his desert of condemnation is beyond measure aggravated^f, and that his destruction arises solely from his contempt of proffered mercy.]

3. Those who are brought to a saving knowledge of Christ—

[What thanks can you ever render to the Lord for the benefits which he has conferred on *you*? Think of the extent and magnitude of those blessings — — — Think how entirely you owe them to the sovereign grace of God — — — Think what a difference is hereby put between you and others, not in this world only, but also in the world to come; and not for time only, but for eternity — — — Will not the very stones cry out against you, if *you* hold your peace? — — — Methinks, your every thought should be adoration; your every word be praise.]

We shall need no farther inducement to praise our God, if only we reflect, that,

III. The more we abound in this blessed exercise, the more exalted will our happiness be—

^c Gen. ii. 7.

^d Acts xiv. 17.

^e Deut. iv. 8. Neh. ix. 13, 14.

^f John iii. 19.

[What employment have we for our breath that can be compared with this? Doubtless there is much happiness in social converse: but this is nothing in comparison of that which is enjoyed in converse with our God — — The language of *prayer* is delightful to every humble soul; but the language of *praise* is an anticipation and foretaste of heaven itself. In heaven there is no other employment, nor will there be to all eternity^g — — It is not possible for a man to be otherwise than happy whilst he is blessing and praising God. This is not an occupation in which a mind discontented or disconsolate can engage: there must of necessity be peace, and love, and gratitude, and joy; yea, in proportion as the praise is ardent, there must be, as the foundation of it, an admiring, an adoring, an overwhelming sense of the Divine goodness.]

APPLICATION—

[Let not any of you say, This employment is not for me: for it is the duty of “every thing that hath breath.” There is no creature in the universe so afflicted, but he has encouragement to pray, and scope for praise — — Some have an idea, that nothing but sighing and mourning are suited to their condition; and that the voice of praise and thanksgiving is for those only who have attained a fuller assurance of their acceptance with God. But they might as well say, that gratitude was not their duty, as, that they were not called upon to express their gratitude in the language of praise. Know, Brethren, that “whosoever offereth God praise, glorifieth him:” and, his desire is, that every mourning soul should “put off his sackcloth, and gird him with gladness.” I would not discourage humiliation: for I well know that it should ever be an associate of our sublimest joys: but this I would say to all; That Christ came to “give unto them the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;” and that, in the experience of this, they shall approve themselves “trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, in whom he will be glorified.” To every creature then, without exception, whether high or low, rich or poor, old or young, I would say with David in a foregoing psalm, “Praise the name of the Lord^h,” yea, begin and close your every service with “Hallelujah, Hallelujah.”]

^g Rev. v. 13.

^h Ps. cxlviii. 11—13.

END OF VOL. VI.

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